A RECORD OF LIFE AND TRAVEL IN BURMA

BY

Comptroller of Assam

WITH 400 ILLUSTRATIONS
INCLUDING 20 COLOURED PLATES
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THE CHINDWIN—(continued)

ABOVE Kalewa, the sandstone cliffs that are a peculiar feature of Chindwin scenery increase in height and continuity, and between these mighty walls there lies in a gap the village of Balet. To this remote settlement were deported many of those prisoners, French and Portuguese, who fell into the hands of the King of Ava after the fall of Syriam, three hundred years ago; and here their descendants, completely Orientalised, may still be traced. Not far from Balet there is the site of an ancient walled city of whose origin little is known. It is believed by some to mark the track of those who first came from India to civilise the Burmese races. The story of the origin of Balet itself is too characteristic of the Burmese idiosyncrasy to be omitted. In the year 990 of the Burmese era, the King of Ava resolved to invade Pegu. He consulted his astrologers with a view to victory, and was told that his commanding general must be a man with black hands. Search was made for such a person, and he was found fishing near the river bank at Letmetaung. He was appointed by the king the commander of his

armies, and led them to victory. To reward him the king bestowed upon him land, two square miles in extent; the revenue (*petlet*) of which he might enjoy (*ciksa*), and he was left free to choose it where he would. Accordingly he set out with a cock placed in the prow of his canoe, and resolved to settle where the cock should crow. At Sin-Kaung Seik, his cock crowed while he was eating, and there he took his land of the king and settled down, naming the place Petlet-sa-myo, subsequently whittled down to Balet.

Above Balet, there appears one of those gateways which are characteristic of the Chindwin. The river narrows between hills, through which it has forced a passage, and beyond, and transverse to the river's course, a line of mountains runs like a great barrier across the horizon. The river widens to a large circular lake above the gates, enclosing an island, and the two streams rush together in tumult as they come through. The western current is very swift, and flows right under the lofty precipices which rise from its edge, and rafts-men say their prayers when they reach this corner. Steamers coming down in the high floods descend tail first, ready to steam away from collision with the rocks. Polesmen, with long poles thrust out, wait by the ship's side to break the impact. Above Masein the Government steamer *Pagan* came to an end. Finding that there was not room enough for her to turn in, she took her chance of cutting the corner, and smashed into it.

Masein displays a grassy foreshore to the falling



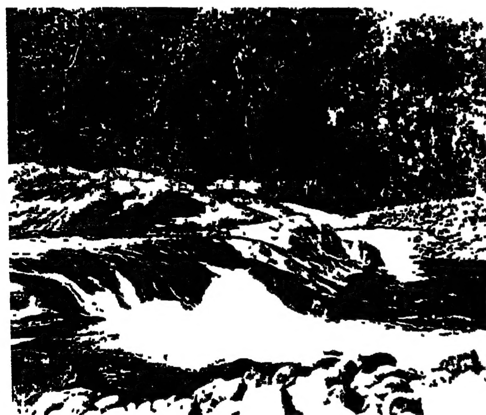
THE FORESHORE OF KALEWA

river, a white pagoda, a telegraph office, and many palms. The telegraph wire spans the whole width of the river. Masein bore an evil reputation in the first days after the war, and from its cliffs the outlaws who haunted it kept a sharp lookout for the coming of the troops. These cliffs indeed are like the walls of a mighty natural fortress.

For a long distance above Masein the river curves majestically under the blue wooded mountains. Their crests are cut like the sharp over-reaching teeth of a saw, and the effect of this succession of curved teeth, all curving up-stream, is a singular one, for they make the mountains look as if they were pursuing the river. For miles there is no sign of human habitation, till we come upon the hamlet of "Nancy Lee," a collection of huts and plantain-groves, a small pagoda, and a chapel, built to appease the evil spirit of the place. It is built on the bank of a creek, which flows through a deep gorge, from whose far gloomy interior the trunks of trees are floated down by the timber-contractors. In the flood season the timber, rushing together down the narrow waters, is stayed in its progress, and the chaos of logs, plunging and crashing in the fury of the river, piles up incessantly as each new log is added to the mass. The loneliness, the savage isolation of such a spot, is heightened for a white man by the knowledge that, far away behind the gorge, and in the remotest places of the hills, there are Englishmen who spend their lives in the timber trade. It is one thing to pass swiftly by in a steamer equipped with the comforts of

civilisation, and another to live a dog's life in the jungle.

The timber-salvor himself, a half-clad son of the forest, is oppressed with the isolation of his life. Festivals and gaiety are little in his way, and at all times he is surrounded by the spirits of nature, nearly all malevolent, all to be appeased with sedulous care. For one lives in his house, another in the whirlpool before his door, a third in the tree he is cutting down, a thousand in the dark mountains that shut his country away from the traffic of the world. A decade ago, to the malevolence of spirits was added the lust and fury of his fellow man. The head-hunter came raiding for his head; the cateran of the hills for his wife, his cattle, for himself. From Ningin, inland, there is a road of the Shan which climbs up to the crest of a hill, its ascent or descent on the far side being accomplished by ladders ranged along the sheer face of the cliffs. By this road the harassed people were used to retreat before a Chin raid, lifting their ladders after them. Here, as we steam on our way to the upper waters of the Chindwin, we are well within the limits of the



A TRIBUTARY

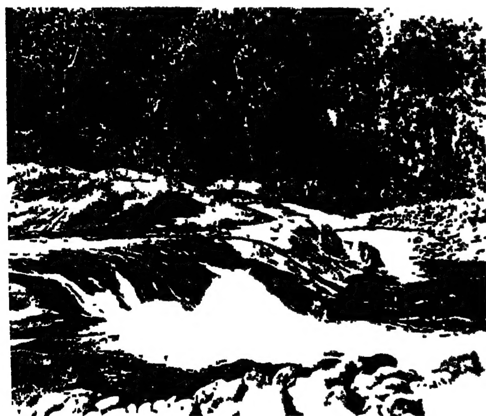
empire, but very near for all that to the core of unrestricted savagery. And I remind myself that, if to-morrow the empire were to withdraw its legions, the curtain of savagery would be instantly let down again.

Continuing from "Nancy Lee" the river runs on under the open glades of the forest, its course broken by sandbanks and grassy islands, till near Maulaikgyi it presents again the spectacle noticed at Mingin. The banks of the river disclose between them an island green with noble trees, and silvery with the plumes of *kaing*, round which, and under the broad barrier of blue peaks and mountains, the divided stream circles. Not very far from here there is a lake, where the rhinoceros is shot. It is a fever-stricken place, a haunt of the Chin, but carefully avoided by the Burman.

Kindat, the winter limit of the company's steamers, is the last British settlement on the Chindwin. Above this point Englishmen go as travellers, to inspect a military outpost, to supervise the construction of a road, to control the work of a native magistrate. But no Englishman lives north of Kindat. The vaguely defined frontier is still several hundred miles away; but all that lies between is ruled by a native officer, or a feudatory prince, or it is not ruled at all. To the British official in Burma, accustomed to life in remote settlements, Kindat is the *ultimæ Thule* of official employment, and, if he goes there, it is either because he is young and must begin somewhere, or because he has offended and must be punished, or because it is cheap

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living there and he is in debt. And Kindat is hated for these things, and because it is built on a low slip of fever-haunted land, between a marsh and a river. Yet all things have their relative value, and to the timber-cutter, fresh from the solitude of the jungle, Kindat is a little capital; for it is a place in which there is more than one white man.

From Kindat to Homalin, a distance of 147 miles, there is little regular traffic, save by means of the Government launches, which ply to and fro with military stores and rations and bodies of armed men. Yet it is above Kindat that the fascination of remote travel finds its full expression.

Past Tatkon, where peewits wing their flight, and glossy ferns and foliage rising in tiers grace the steep banks of the river, the traveller bound for Homalin comes to Pantha and its clusters of white pagodas. Thereafter, the river sweeps round under two thousand feet of hills, and receives the tribute of the Yu from the valley of Kale. Manipur is not far distant, and troops have marched this way to the relief of beleaguered garrisons. The telegraph wire, earliest pioneer of British civilisation, here crosses the Chindwin to Tammu, as far as which outpost the Yu is navigable. At Kadugyabaung the river, flowing through a picturesque defile, makes a curve, from the apex of which its course can be traced through three-quarters of a circle. The curve completes itself under a magnificent cliff, that is crowned with pagodas and is sacred to a *nat*. It is known as the Shwé Palin Daung, and it is typical of the hills



THE HAMLET OF SITTAUNG

along this portion of the river's course, which slope easily on their eastern faces, and end in sudden precipices on the west. The blue mountains, the precipitous cliff, the great curve, make here, between them, an episode of beauty and power. Thirty-one miles of travel from the junction of the Yu bring us to the hamlet of Sittaung, a place of ten houses, which exists because it is on the road to Manipur. It is very unhealthy, but serene of a morning, with its monastery at one end, surrounded by betel-palms, its Government rest-house at the other, and its one narrow street of thatched houses overlooked by *papayas* in full fruit, by plantains and betel-vines. Although remote and isolated, it has nearly all the most beautiful things in nature to look at if it will.

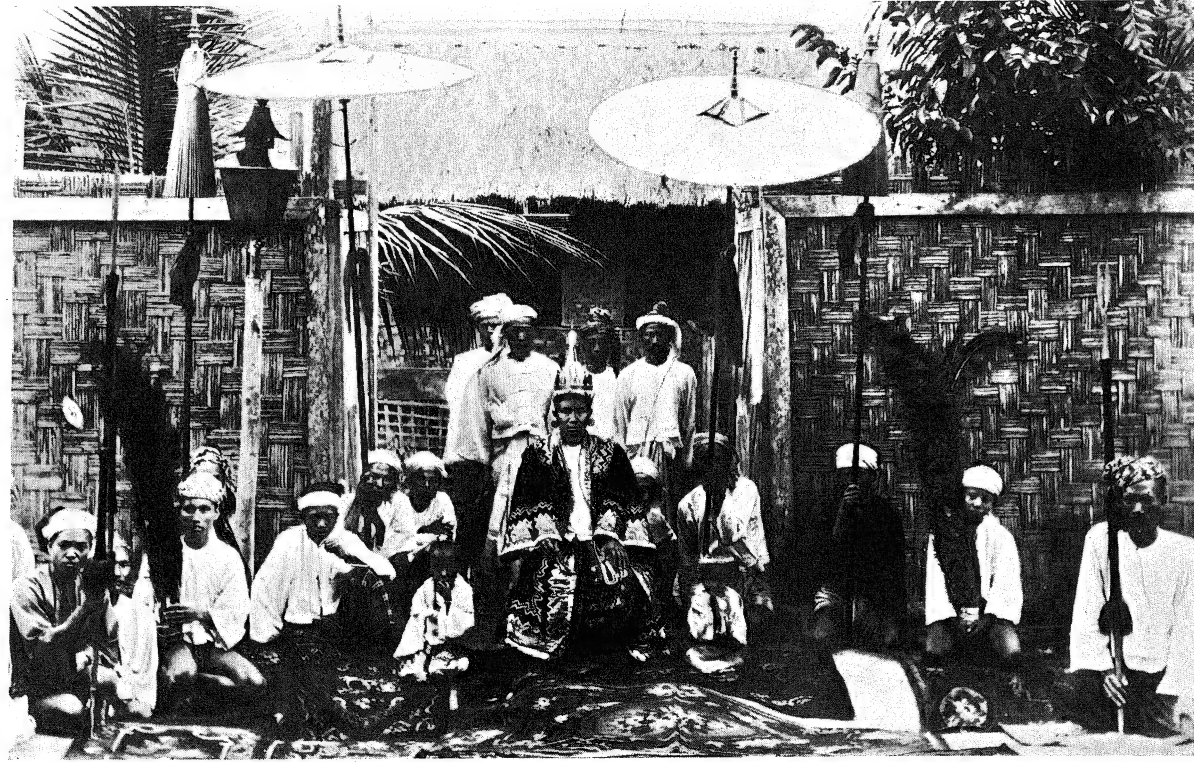
Leaving it, and past a big island and splendid avenues of forest, we come to Paungbyin, a place of some note on the river. A long line of new houses stretches along the high flat shore; a court-house, reached by a bridge and a pathway through the jungle, stands on an adjoining hill; a monastery lies in the seclusion of a grove of palms and other trees. Paddy-flats and snipe grounds spread away beyond. Paungbyin does a considerable trade in buying and rafting down the rice grown in the interior, and in supplying the inland villages with European goods. Every house in the village is a shop, and every inhabitant, by virtue of locality, a trader. Some little time ago the village was burnt down, and now it has arisen again with new splendour. Flower-pots grace the front doors of most of the cottages,

and every one is taking a hand in levelling the open strip of land between the village and the river. House property is cheap at Paungbyin, and the best house in the village, a large and pleasant-looking habitation, is tenanted by a man whose income is only £12 a year. But the habitable space is limited by the lowlands and swamps that surround the village; and there is conse-



SUNSET AT PAUNGBYIN

quently a large colony of water-dwellers under the river bank, whose houses are built on rafts. On the farther shore is the neat village of Pasagon, and beyond it flats and marshes stretch away to the feet of successive ranges of blue hills, which divide the Kubo valley, once in dispute between the kings of Burma and Manipur, from the Chindwin. Of an evening, the view



THE SAW-BWA OF THAUNGDUT

from the court-house, which stands on the fringe of the impenetrable jungle, is one of superb beauty; for the Chindwin may be seen from there, winding away in great loops, yet still as if life had never moved upon it; a water of infinite calm, painted with every glory of mountain shadow, and cloud aflame. But Paungbyin is unwholesome, lonely, and fever-stricken; a place of bitter memory to Englishmen who have spent a year or two of their lives there. It has been supplanted now by Homalin, at the junction of the two principal rivers of the district, and the task of ruling the wild country that spreads away to an indefinite border beyond it has been confided to a Burmese officer. It is not the least interesting feature of Paungbyin to-day, that its headman is a woman—a pleasant-looking girl, who has succeeded her father in that office.

After leaving the hilly crests of Paungbyin, the river runs a long straight course, like some noble canal, between grassy banks and forest, till at Minya there appears a great island in mid-stream, and the approach to Mingin is repeated. Above the island, the river, very wide to the eye, curves slowly through a dark forest, whose summits, helped by the natural elevation of the banks, rise to very stately heights. On a little rock at Letpantha, the golden spires of a cluster of small pagodas gleam in the forefront of the forest masses.

Thaungdut, capital of a principality, lies on the mid-curve of the river, where it makes a great sweep,

a short way above Letpantha. It is a clean little village, with one long, wide street facing the river, under avenue of palms and horse-radishes. The palace is a collection of mat huts, within an enclosure of high mat walls,



THE CHINDWIN: "WATER OF INFINITE CALM"

the posts of which are decorated with orchids. But the Saw-bwa is careful to explain that he occupies it only as a temporary measure, that his predecessor's widow, a lady of strong character, is in possession of the ancestral site; and he comes down with his retainers, with a gift of spears and peacocks, to lay this matter before the English ruler of the district, as we let go our anchor, under the foreshore of his capital. And after he has gone, comes the lady with her daughter, to state *her* view of the matter. The Saw-bwa hates her, because she has allowed her daughter to contract a *mésalliance* with the son of a goldsmith, and the

goldsmith's son, who was turned out of the state by the Saw-bwa, has come up with us to claim his right to live in his native village with the wife of his choice. Such are the matters of state that bring us in the Government yacht to Thaungdut, and, while we smile at the comedy, we remember that life is cheap in these localities.

The Saw-bwa is a person of some consequence in his own country. He claims that the history of his state began twenty-eight centuries ago, and that its first capital was a walled city in the days of Gautama, the Buddha. The blood of Anawrata the Great flows



"CURVING SLOWLY THROUGH A DARK FOREST"

in his veins, and the right of his ancestors to a palace and a throne was admitted by that monarch, and in more recent times confirmed by Mindon, King of Burma. A sumptuary law of that monarch lays down

that the front pavilion of the Saw-bwa's *haw* or palace shall have nine mainposts, and the main room five stories; a gold *hti* on the spire of the court-room, a vane with a flowered shaft, a white umbrella, and a throne with twelve chambers. These concessions were made by the king in return for the Saw-bwa's gift of a white elephant, happily found within the limits of his state. The Saw-bwa is now a feudatory of the empire, and the area of his state is five hundred and fifty square miles. He leaves behind him, after a visit, the impression of being a gentleman; and he plays polo in the Manipurian manner, when his polo-ground is not flooded by the river.

Above Thaungdut the river encircles a large island, then runs on in a straight path facing a mountain barrier, and attains in the full noontide an exquisite beauty, where it curves by Hwemadai Laungmin, with rich forests on either bank, and a range of blue-green mountains curving in fellowship with it on the west. It loses nothing of its apparent size here, being broad and full from one bank to the other, and unbroken by sands or islands. From moment to moment as the wind blows, or as it dies away, the face of the river changes from crinkling ripples to a crystal calm; and the clouds in rhythm fling their shadows lazily on the mountain slopes.

Beyond these passages of varied beauty, the double-mouthed Nampanga pours her quota into the sovereign river, and all the land between is of alluvial flats, and winding broken channels, overlooked by great



THE MAGISTRATE OF HOMALIN AND HIS FAMILY

mountains. Then, as the river circles to the west, the Uyu comes down to it, flowing between low mudbanks.

Above the junction an island, laden with silver-green *kaing*, cuts the broad purple spaces of the river with its sharp outline, and beyond lies Homalin, a line of lowly houses at the feet of the giant mountains. The village is, in fact, a long way from them, for the river, making an unsuspected curve to the north, sweeps in between them and Homalin. But the illusion remains of a village in a mountain country, Swiss or Tyrolese, with great masses towering above it. The mountains here run into nine thousand feet, and their nearer slopes are patterned with patches of rough cultivation. Their summits are constantly veiled in clouds, which impart to them an air of grandeur and mystery; and white wisps of cloud lie in the lofty valleys, deepening the perspective, and causing the nearer peaks and ridges to stand out sharp and blue against their quiet curtains. Rain mists gather in the far interior, lit with the last rays of the fading sun; distant peaks seen through this diaphanous veil become transfigured; and the great material barrier of the mountains, frowning over the dark river and the little street of houses, seems only the threshold of a far-withdrawn land of spiritual and unearthly beauty.

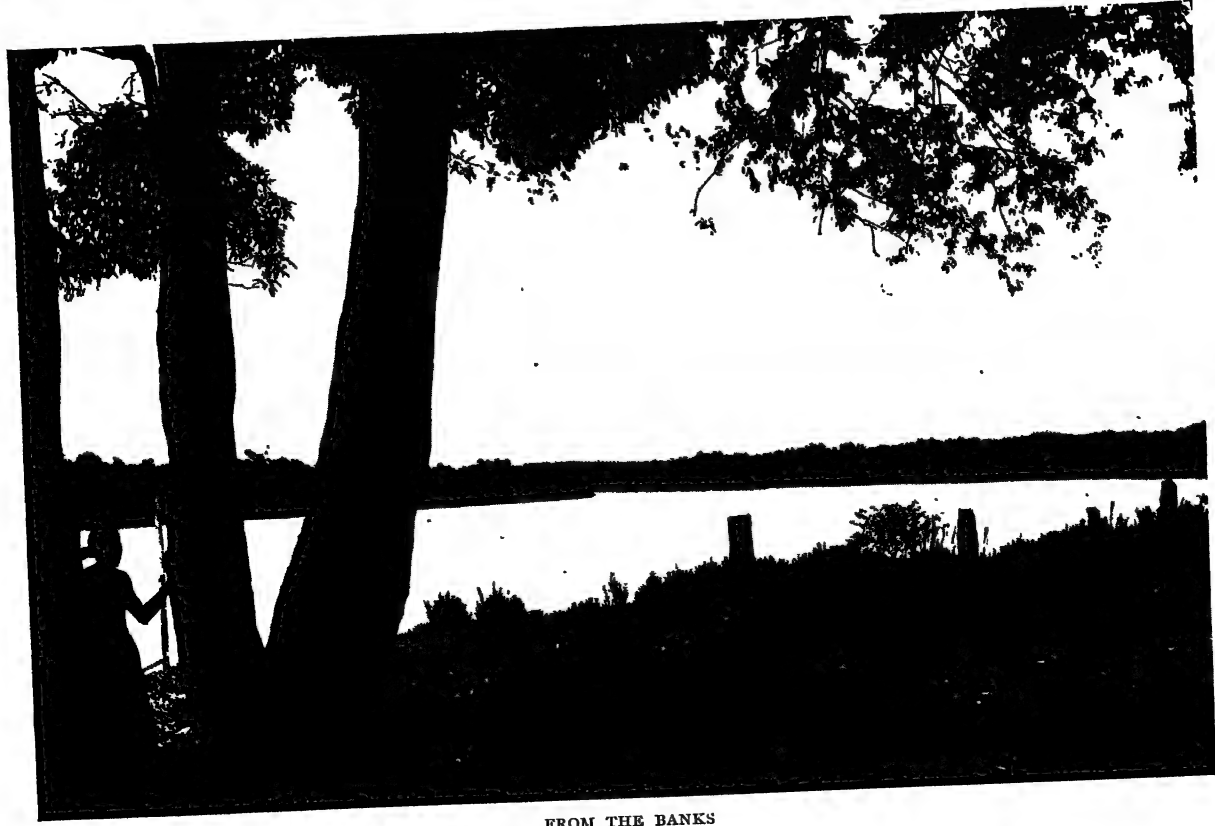
Little is known of many of these mountain tracts. In the language of the State they are "unadministered," and there is little desire on any one's part to break through the immemorial seclusion in which they live.

Down by the river all is peace. Spread abroad here

over vast spaces, it is almost motionless. It is shallow, and the winter waits to expose its shallowness. Yet the purple shadows of the mountains lend it the suggestion of unfathomed deeps. Little, if any, life moves on its surface. A derelict log floats by with scarcely perceptible motion; sand-bubbles break and spread their concentric rings on it in silence. From the cover of the silver *kaing*, a buffalo waddles slowly down to the river's edge, mammoth-like—a counterpart of the slow, quiet world about him. In the fading light he makes a clear black spot on the landscape—a lictor of the night. On the distant eastern horizon, clouds, like white puffs from a furnace, stayed in the full tide of their life, become a palette for the last light of the sun, and their lustrous reflections make all the river, looking down, a mirror of pink and opal loveliness, that is in supreme antithesis to the dark mystery, the deep unfathomable purple of it, under the mountains.

Mountains and river are here in close fellowship, yet those blue-green patches on the slopes, and the line of little houses by the river, are a whole world apart. To the mountaineer, all below is a forbidden tract of civilisation, once, in the great days gone by, his prey. To the plainsman, all that is of the mountains savours of savagery greater than his own, and a hate that is never asleep. The one from his valley hamlets, the other from his eyrie on the cliffs, regard each other and pass by. There is no communion between them.

Homalin is in the keeping of an Aracanese officer, one of the ablest of his countrymen. He rules here



FROM THE BANKS

over a country of more than 2,500 square miles in extent; the finest of all the fine shooting grounds of Burma.

Early dawn, and I am afloat once more on the Chindwin, making the great curve above Homalin under forest-clad cliffs; while the mountain masses deploy in the west, in peaks and waves and precipices. Faint clouds hover near their summits, but this morning not *on* them, and the first efforts of the sun only make shadows fall on their broad expanses. They are no hills these, but mountains of the grand order, and the spectacle of them, their rocky peaks and wooded valleys, so near that one can recognise all the familiar features, stirs up a great longing to be up amongst them. Ah! what views must expand from there, over the fair river valley, and the waves upon waves of mountains that roll away to the far plains of the west! What under-worlds of fern and bracken, and violets dew-besprinkled! What beakers of divine air! And for the rest, elephants crashing through the forest, rhinoceroses in the secret woods, panthers in lair, wandering herds of bison, and visionary pheasants dropping from heights into the gloom of the sheltered valleys.

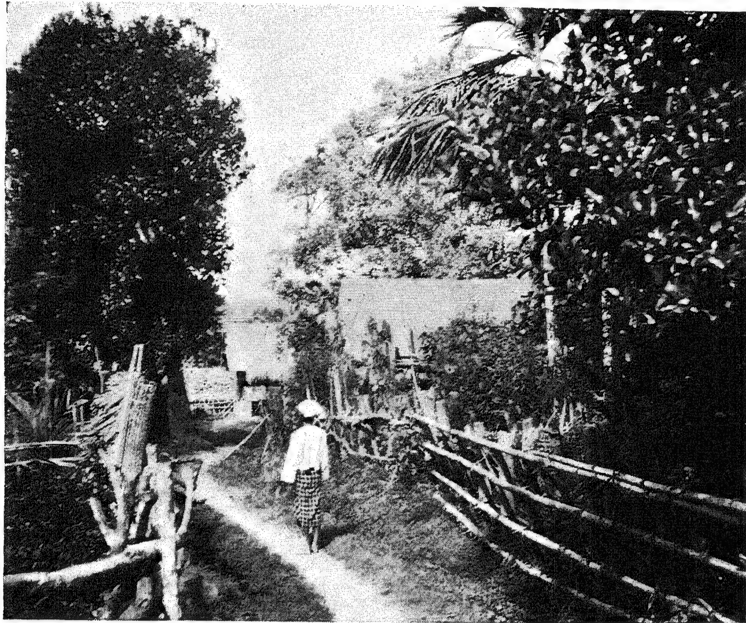
But I am bound to-day to the river, and may not neglect its beauty, at this hour of soft lights and long shadows. An island, with its familiar chisel-like apex, bears down upon us in mid-stream. The river enfolds it in two sweeping curves, and it looks like a mighty ship afloat. It is of a new order, for all the islands I have hitherto met have borne the family feature of

rustling, wind-blown savannahs, set with noble trees, park-like, and of a light emerald-green. Here I come to dark forest, and white stems; forest to the outer bulwarks, overhanging the very lips of the river. All that I can fancy of American rivers in the north is here depicted. There is no whisper of the East. The change is opportune, for it reminds me that I have passed out of the tropics, and am now within the Temperate Zone—a comforting reflection, when one lives very near the Equator.


SARAMATI IN THE DISTANCE

Sein Kan, with its orange orchards and the red spires of its monastery, waits at the turning of the river, and its next curve, a quick, short loop, brings us up to Kawya. For a long while past the wooded banks of the river have talked of pines, and here the likeness may be recorded. Straight grey trunks of the silver hue and the nude beauty of the longifolia, gnarled and twisted arms, and light summit foliage, make these trees look like twin brothers of the pines, and one is grateful for the suggestion. Also, when the red light of evening flames on their bare trunks and arms, and the sky is cut into patterns by their fantasies, it is difficult to resist the illusion.

Kawya is a pleasing little village of the Shan. Lanes wind through it, piloted by rustic fences. Flowers add somewhat to its charm. The houses stand for the most part in little enclosures of their own, and it is not their way here to face the street. They are roofed with rough palm thatch which projects far ovre



KAWYA

the front of each house in a semicircle. Under its open shelter, weaving and winnowing and many other household avocations are performed. Tea grows at Kawya, but the bushes are allowed to grow up untrimmed. Behind the village, amongst the tea-plants, one is rather in a rough orchard, half jungle, than in a trim tea-

garden. The leaves are boiled and sold to trading Burmans who raft them down the river. Seeds have been sold to "men from the west"; but no purchasers have appeared for the past three years. The last comers were emissaries from the white planters of Assam. The seed trade is not, it would seem, a prospering one; but a large business is done in boiled tea for export to Lower Burma.

At Kawya there is a colony of dark pagodas overlooking the river; *tagôn-daings* of glittering mosaic; and a thousand Buddha stupa overlaid with gold. The river bank recalls Bhamo. The people dress like Burmese. Yet the village is not Burmese in its suggestion. I have long since left Burma behind me and am here amongst the Shan.

Kawya has for its neighbour an island, cleaving south. Above it the river runs on unbroken between rich woods to Maung-Kan, where oranges grow.

Tazon follows, also a place of tea. From Maing Taung to Shwelaung there is a straight way marked out for the river, between near woods on the east and great forests on the west, reaching away over flat and rolling country to the foot of the mountains, whence they climb in unbroken splendour to heights of eight thousand feet. The Nan-Kaung here comes down with its tribute, and the place of its union with its over-lord is green and tempting. One would willingly stay to trace its secret course, of which there is only a glimpse from the passing ship. Later the Namwe enters. A waterfall of great size is visible on the face



IN THE TEA ORCHARDS AT KAWYA

of the distant cliffs, and at Maingwe the further course of the river is concealed from the eye, so sharp is the curve it makes there. A passage of marked beauty follows, the river winding in and out, through "zones of light and shadow," its waters gaining clarity with every mile, till it reaches the climax of a horseshoe curve, where the Nayayin enters at Yet Pa. Both arms of the river here reach away like lakes, through avenues of forest to the stately mountains, whose king is Saramati, snow-crowned like Soracte, in the winter. The winds that blow here at this season are laden with the scent of forest flowers—a rich heavy scent as from a distillery. There are miles upon miles of it here.

After the horseshoe turn at Yet Pa—noblest passage of the Chindwin—the river breaks away to the east,

and the mountains pass out of immediate sight; but the woods line it with continuous beauty, and in the waning afternoon every white trunk on the eastern shore meets its image in the clear water.

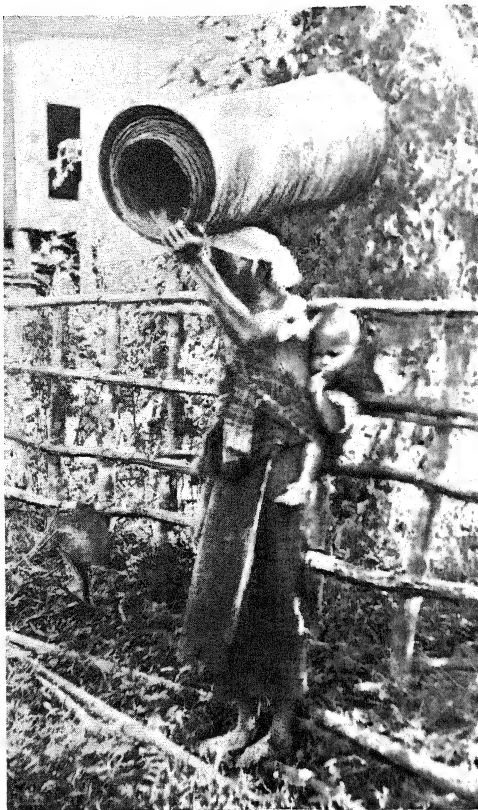
At Tamanthé the river returns again to its mountains, which loom up blue and majestic in bold outline against the sky; waves upon waves of them, ramparts, and peaks, and shadowy valleys. The sun, passing on to the portals of night, sends his last splendour abroad from behind the clouds that marshal his retreat. Wide shafts of light flame in fans over the spaces of heaven. From cloud to cloud the fires race until, through infinite gradations, the day runs out to its close.



MAUNG-KAN

Tamanthé is the last British outpost on the Chindwin. It is garrisoned by half a hundred fighting men, under the command of a Sikh officer. The steamer has scarcely done screaming, the gangway planks are not yet slippery with the wet footprints of the crew, when he comes hurrying along, under the stress of a tight uniform and long sword dangling by his side, to pay his respects. White man to him is synonymous with ruler, and three Englishmen do not come this way in

the year. His men are hastily forming up on the parade ground, and he is disappointed that they are not to be inspected. No one ever comes to Tamanthé except for some such purpose. The Subahdar practically rules here alone.



PORTERAGE

Two miles beyond Tamanthé is the village of Htwatwa, on the further shore of the Nam Talei, which comes down here, a broad swift stream, fresh from the Naga strongholds. There is a pathway to Htwatwa from Tamanthé through the dense forest, and midway in its stillness one can hear the booming of the village drums, falling clear and seemingly close at hand, like the hammered notes of the woodpecker.

And now the last day of my voyage has come. The actualities of rule have almost ceased, and wide *incognita*, unvisited by any Englishman, surround me

on every hand. For another day or two I might prolong the journey to where the cataract of Taro forbids all progress; but, to all practical purposes, I am already at the end of civilised means of travel. Leaving Tamanthé at grey dawn, I am now ascending through loops and curves, and under cliffs buried deep in forest. Miles of wild plantains line the more level banks, and bamboos reach over with a million fingers to the river's edge. Toucans and hornbills flutter purple through the spaces; peacocks throw their splendid plumage to the sun; the narrow turnings blaze with the jewels of the morning. Here and there at long intervals a village shelters, pathetic in its suggestion of human loneliness. At Tonma Hlut the river turns westward; the mountains deploy. In the foreground there are green hills, and at the turn—again north—the whirlpool of Tonlon lies in wait. Duck wing in flights up the river courses. Tributaries steal through the woods, charged with the secrets of their hidden birthplace. The air pulses with the spirit of the unknown. That is the charm of these lonely reaches.

I continue north. Saramati and the great peaks rise above me in a great wall to the west. Every mile the ship steams on takes me nearer to blessed centres of the Temperate Zone; and here, and at this season (October), the climate attains to something that is very near perfection. The sky is a clear and limpid blue. The clouds that are never wholly absent through the hours add to it only gracious things—light, and action,

and an infinite variety. At the close and at the dawn of each day, they are palettes for every colour that can rejoice the eyes of man. All through the long hours of the day they swoon on the mirror face of the river, and every peak has their benediction. High noon has no power in it to overcome the coolness of the air. Midnight has not yet learnt her secret of chilling cold. There is no rawness yet in the dawn. At this turning season Nature seems to suspend her life, in some subtle state of equilibrium. Summer and winter mingle in full harmony; and the coming panoplies of autumn give no note of their approach in the heart of the green forests, where ferns drip, and flowers breathe, as if the spring were young.

Fresh curves and avenues bring me to Malin, and the river still runs on in its pride, as though it derived its life from secret springs, and cared nothing for its tributaries—the Myittha, and the Uyu and the Nam Talei—left far in the fading south.

I pass into the territories of Zingkaling Hkamti, three hundred miles due west of Tali Fu, and in a line with the confluence of the Irrawaddy. The state, almost extinct when the British power advanced up the waters of the Chindwin, was revived in favour of a scion of the old royal house. It has an area of two thousand square miles, extending northwards as far as the waterfall, which finally forbids the navigation of the Chindwin, and it is one of the last surviving relics of the ancient Shan kingdom, which long disputed the supremacy of the Burmese race in the valley of the

Upper Irrawaddy. From Minsin, in the east, the river curves to Naukpè, and, looking back from here, there is a fine view of the troubled outline and citadel-like forms of the hills, that rise between the river and the mountain wall of the wild Chins in the west.

Ledges of cliff and rock abut on the river, deep in hanging fern and velvet-textured moss. At these points the river swirls and foams, impeded in its straight course; and the line of the high floods on its rocky walls tells eloquently of a greatly fallen river. Foot by foot, and inch by inch, till the melting of winter snows again replenishes its flood, the river gives back to the land the territories it has won. But the marks of its supremacy, like blast holes and chisel cuts, bespatter the rocky banks all the way from Monywa to Hkamti.



A GLIMPSE FROM ASHORE

Pink and black buffaloes all along the river stare, through the reeds, out of wild eyes at the passing steamer. Here and there a party of men, with *dahs* slung over their naked shoulders, and women in scarlet wrappings which drop in a fall over their ample breasts,

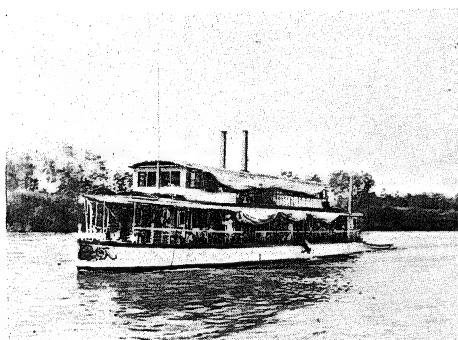
march along the banks, stopping to gaze like their cattle at the portent on the river.

Past Yan-ywa, the river gains a sudden access of beauty. A cliff runs down to it on the east. Low hills rise on the west bank. Through this gateway the river stretches away to the great mountains. Their slopes are so close now that I can count on Saramati the trees in flower, which make a yellow pattern on the pervading blue, and the deep gorge ten thousand feet above the sea, mist-clad and shadowy in the sunlight, reminds me of the Himalaya.

Here also the navigation is dangerous. Under the cliff the river runs hard. Sands lie across it near the further bank. The channel is narrow, the current rapid, the bend acute. To turn it, coming down-stream, is something of a feat. A little farther on, the same episode is reproduced on the opposite bank; but complicated further by a reef, which stretches like a paw from the hills into the river. There is a great curve above it, and the waters, sweeping round in its fold, hurl themselves upon the reef, and surmount it in waves that leap with life, and in eddies that bubble and scatter with the rapidity of lightning. A golden galon-bird high up on a grey post marks this spot of sinister character.

Traces of cultivation are visible at long intervals along the banks; the cultivation of the migrating peasant, whose system is so rude that the finest soil cannot pay his drafts upon it for more than a few seasons. There is no mistaking the symptoms of the

taung-gya cultivator; the white skeletons of burnt trees standing gaunt and bare in the rough, rakish-looking fields. It is a bad, wasteful system, and it can never be made the basis of any racial progress; yet it must be difficult for men to break from this restless life; for it has its joys, its recurring excitement, its novelty, its sense of freedom, its little toil. It is the antithesis of the life of an English villager, living upon an immemorial site.



THE GOVERNMENT YACHT

At Auk Taung my journey ends. It is a small village, newly come into existence. There are blade-marks on a *ficus elastica* of great size and many columns; the only relics of a former settlement. The people here are Shan, with the figures of mountaineers, short, broad, and immensely muscular.

As I wait here, under the high mud-cliffs, the sunlight passes, and the night comes, dark and still. The village falls into deep slumber. A cricket beats his kettledrums from a neighbouring tree. The plaint of the nightjar is borne across the dark.

Even these pass.

A great silence falls upon the world.

But the river, knowing no pause, moves on, and the

stars in their courses come and go. These two alone stand for life.

Late, towards dawn, the fading crescent of the moon climbs up like a tired pedlar, over the low eastern hills, followed by the morning star.



CHAPTER XXV

MOSQUITOES

MAUBIN, if you descend upon it from Upper Burma in the dust-choked days of early April, will smile upon you with its air of perpetual summer; and you will wonder at its clarity and freshness, and its undying verdure. But Maubin, like most of the Delta in which it has sprung into being, conceals much that is disagreeable under its smiling exterior. From its immense riches nothing can detract; but it lacks one or two of the constituents of civilised happiness. It has been ironically named the Garden of Eden, after the governor who founded it, and in tribute to some of its less inviting characteristics.

Perhaps its greatest claim to the notice and the execration of mankind resides in its populace of mosquitoes. These, in number, size, and virulent activity, are unsurpassed in the world. One's first visit to Maubin in the mosquito season is an experience, and to see them under the flare of an electric search-light, come over the ship's side in hordes, and occupy like an irresistible army every fraction of its surface; to see them hanging in festoons from the white canvas



MAUBIN

awnings, the mosquito nets, the table-linen, and the *punkha* flaps, and from every object on which they can secure a footing, including notably the *corpus vile* of the white man, for whom Providence made the Universe, is to have lived indeed. How to continue to live after the novelty of the spectacle has worn off, is the definite problem that occupies every one's mind in Maubin. It is achieved in the main by entrenching one's self within an iron fortress of fine mesh.

A European house in Maubin is thus a curiosity. Every window—and in the tropics there is an infinity of windows—is protected by sliding curtains of iron gauze; every ventilator under the eaves, every open

space between the room partitions and the roof (and for the sake of air, such spaces are large and frequent), is barred against invasion by sheets of gauze. In some houses there is a special room, a kind of inner citadel and last refuge, which is wholly of iron gauze, and within it, the master of the house sits like a vanquished lion in a cage.

To enter this fortress in advance of the enemy calls for the exercise of agility of a high order. The doors have swing-backs, and are made to close the instant that they are released. Outside them, the light cavalry of the enemy hover in clouds. The man within, this Englishman in his strange castle, observes your approach with furtive and anxious eyes, and if you be a newcomer, he begs of you to be careful in entering. Immediately you enter, he falls with an astonishing onslaught upon such of the enemy as have come in on your back, in your hair, in the creases of your clothes, and in an aurora of cloud about your brows.



FISHING IN THE DELTA

At one end of the Chief Magistrate's house, there used to be, when I was last at Maubin, a long room thus defended, in which he sat daily to dispense justice; and great activity in entering was expected of the prisoner under trial, the assembled witnesses, and the counsel employed in each case. Many a sentence, it is whispered, has fallen with enhanced severity from judicial lips; many a prisoner has come away with a lighter punishment, as the consequence of his manner of entering the court. And the same circumstance has



THE COURT-HOUSE, MAUBIN

played, and, it is hinted, still plays, no little part in the rise and fall of advocates; in the lifting of one man to some giddy pinnacle of honour, in the degradation of another to depths of official displeasure.

It is not to be expected that a career at Maubin



THE LANDING-PLACE AT WAKEMA

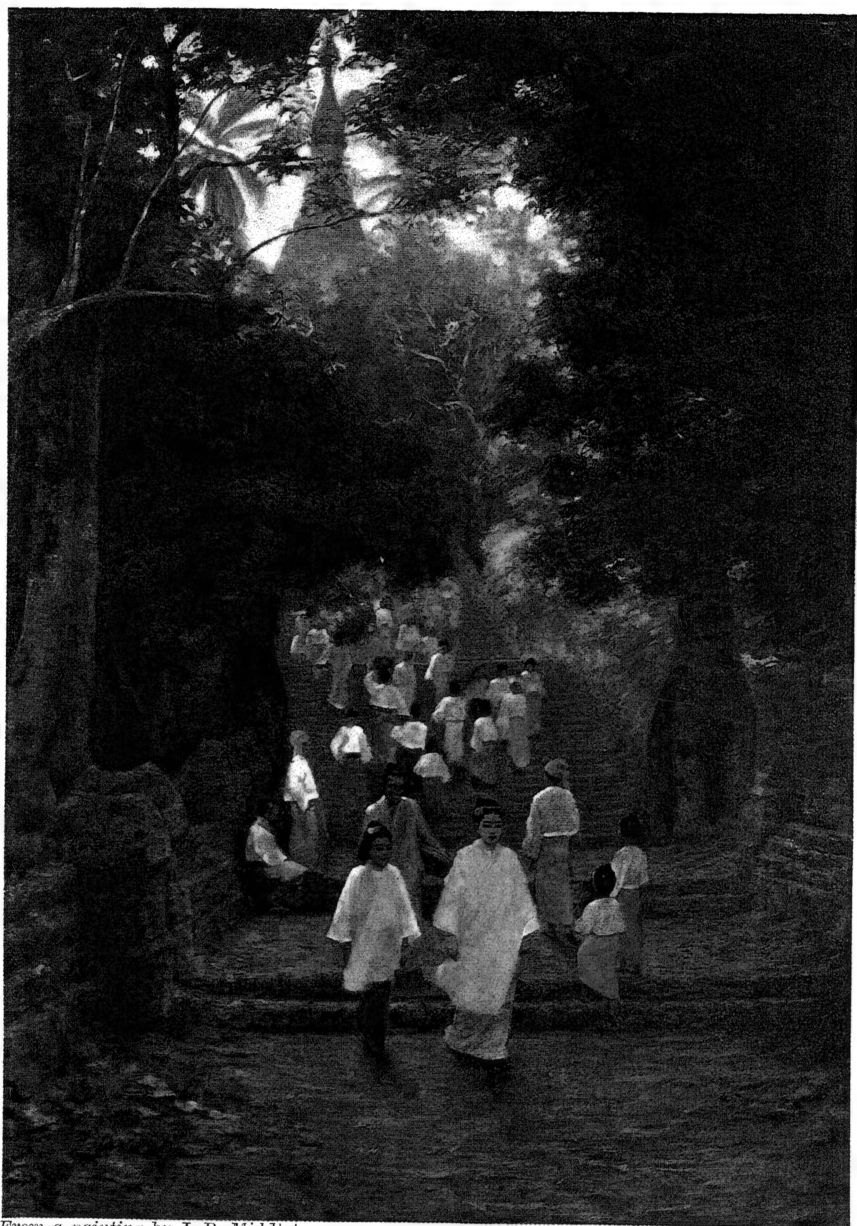


MAUBIN RIVER

should leave no trace upon the habits of one who has been there; that the faculty and practice of entering and leaving a room by a narrow door in the shortest possible time should not betray itself in the style and poise of his figure. And in fact, long after your Chief Magistrate—he is sometimes sent here for his sins—long after he has left Maubin behind him on his way to the stars of the official firmament, or to leisured retirement in England, he is to be known by his looks, by his gait, above all by his slick manner of entering a half-closed door. There is a man now living at the Bhanchuds, in the opulent ease of the fabled Anglo-

Indian. His chair is placed in view of the doors that open when members enter. And he sits there in a material paradise and waits. His head, once auburn, is now bald; his skin, once fresh, is yellow now and tough; his eyes are fishy and lack lustre. He is not a conversational man. But at long intervals the doors upon which his eyes are fixed open to a newcomer, who, entering with a sudden dart, slams them to, and looks anxiously about him, as if pursued by an enemy. It is the signal for a strange metamorphosis in the figure of the expectant sitter. His limbs quicken with electric suddenness; pleasure beams in his fishy eyes, and, rising, he welcomes the newcomer with voluble delight. For, once upon a time, he also was Chief Magistrate of Maubin. 'Tis an exclusive caste.

There is a tale also of an old tragedy, which is told by the Delta skippers in their cups. It is one of those pathetic and awful histories which men tell with reluctance, and never to a stranger. It relates how a young magistrate who came to Maubin loved a fair daughter of the soil. She was very soft and gentle, and her eyes were of the large, dark, and lustrous kind, which are crucibles for the very hearts of men. Grey-headed captains are still moved to emotion when they describe this beautiful creature—the Lily of Maubin. She wore the yellow-hearted *champak* in her glossy hair, red-gold on her wrists, and shimmered in rich silks amongst the sunflowers of her native land. For a year or more they lived happily together, heedless of Circulars, of the Bishop, of the passing world;



From a painting by J. R. Middleton.

A PAGODA IN THE JUNGLE.

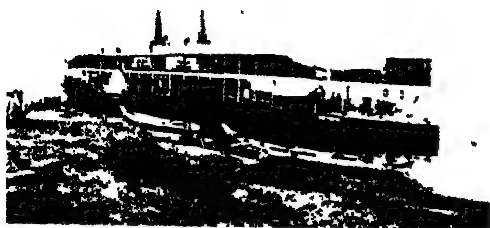
and they might have lived happily to the end, had not Miss Mary Smith arrived at Maubin. She was the sister of the Commandant; a good girl, fresh, rosy, unspoilt; an English maiden, who brought with her memories of half-forgotten things, of country lanes and buttercups and blackberries; of rural joys, and grey churches hidden under immemorial trees. Yet dear and innocent as she was, tragedy chose to follow in her train.

As the days passed, the dark lustrous eyes of the girl amongst the sunflowers widened with pain and dismay; for she saw her world, all her world of love and wonder, falling about her in ruins. And one day the end came. "Mah May," said her magistrate, "you are a good girl —I am sorry to say good-bye. In this bag you will find a hundred and fifty rupees. My clerk Maung So is a rising man. Good-bye, little one; I am going—to be married."

Mah May broke her heart of despair; but before she died, she bored a small hole with her dagger in the gauze. In his chair within, the magistrate, dreaming of happiness, lay asleep. It is surmised by some that Mah May put him to sleep. That has never been proved. But the stark fact remains that the next morning, when his servants darted in through the swing-backed doors, they found their beloved master had vanished. All they came upon was a peculiar-looking object shrivelled and dry, in a suit of European clothes, made by a tailor in the Strand. The frame-work of bone, and the crinkled sheet of skin which enclosed it, pointed

to the conclusion that this was once a man. *But every drop of blood had been sucked out of his body.*

There are other tales, certified to by gentlemen of veracity and honour; tales which are among the commonplaces of life, in this beautiful country of great rivers, and bellying sails, and tropic luxury; and yet I am reluctant to repeat them, lest in other lands they should meet with a foolish incredulity.



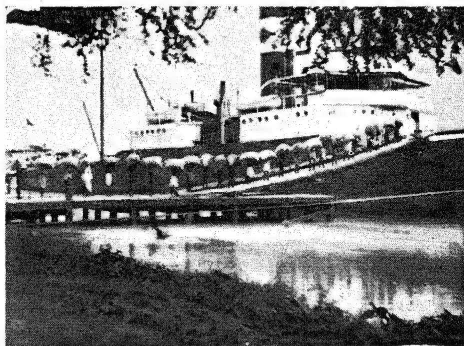
THE MAIL PACKET FROM MANDALAY

Apart from mosquitoes, Maubin, built on the edge of a winding river, and immersed in the rich metallic beauty of the south, has qualities that make for attraction. Here there is no sense of isolation, for the river is the main highway of the Delta. All through the dry season, from the ceasing of the rains in November to their coming again in June, big steamers pass down it, and up it, to the number of a score a week.

And when they come at night, they fling their searchlights up the winding avenues, and transform the world of dark cumulose trees, of swaying forests of cane, of red-roofed houses, and spired pagodas glittering with gold, into a stage-land of extraordinary picturesqueness. The trees look as if they were cut in stiff velvet, the people as if they were actors in a play. Movement is

personified as the coolies swarm up the gangways, and the lascars plunge into the flame-lit water, and strain at the hauling-ropes as they race along the grass-covered banks.

Some of the steamers that come this way are of the largest size; mailers on their way from Mandalay; cargo-boats with flats in tow, laden with the produce of the land; and when they come round the bend of the river into full view of Maubin, the great stream shrinks and looks strangely small, as if it were being overcome by a monster from another world. Three hundred feet they are in length, these steamers, and with flats in tow, half as wide, and they forge imperiously ahead as if all space belonged to them, and swing round and roar out their anchor chains, while the lascars leap, and the skipper's white face gleams in the heavy shadows by the wheel—the face of a man in command.



LOADING A CARGO OF RICE

And when you see this wonderful spectacle for the first time, you step on board the great boat expecting to find an imperious man, with eyes alight with power, and the consciousness of power, and the knowledge that he is playing a great part. But you are disappointed, for you find a plain man, very

simple in his habits and ways, with weariness written about the corners of his red eyes. Ah! they know their work, these men, if any one does; and they do it, as the genuine sailor always does, thoroughly and without talk, and they race these ships of theirs, big as ocean steamers, round corners, and over shallows,



A CREEK AT EBB TIDE

with less than a foot of water between them and a blasted reputation, with a skill and daring of which they are wholly unconscious. And I say nothing of the Clydesmen who rule the throbbing engines, and say even less than the skipper.

Besides the big steamers, there are numerous little



IN BASSEIN RIVER

launches, which puff with importance, and there are the boats of the people; the great *hnaw* with her bellying sails, gliding like a beautiful phantom up-stream, or trailing down to the measured fall of twenty oars; the cargo-tub with her red canvas full-bosomed to the wind; the sampan flying under stress of sail; the ferry dugout paddled by a woman and a boy. All of these come and go, and they are to be seen from any one of the many windows of Maubin that overlook the river.



POTTERS OF BASSEIN

The town is built on the lip of a large island, which, a few years ago, was like an atoll or soup-plate, sunk in the centre; and in

this centre lay malaria-haunted marshes and trackless forest. Then there came along that Government which, according to the gospel of the new revilers, is the cause of all famines, and it built a great embankment, the object of which was to reclaim this wilderness, by shutting out the flood waters that every year came in at its gates. Emigrants have poured in since then, and populated tracts which were totally uninhabited; places "where a man would be afraid to meet his own brother in the dark." Dedaye, Wakema Maubin, all flourishing centres, are of recent birth The State in this enterprise was in advance of the people, and at first they were afraid to come in and be drowned, as they said; but a start was made, the first crops yielded a hundred and twenty baskets to the acre (eighty being a full crop), and the horde came in. The Delta of the Irrawaddy is thus, in spite of its limitations, a land of romance. The element of growth in it is alone sufficient to seize upon the imagination. For it is growing every day, and new land, the building-up of ages, is lifting its head above the level of the waters. New rivers and waterways are being created; old ones, swept within easy memory by the passing ships, are now sealed and ready almost for the plough. From an amphibious savagery there is growing up a country that must rank before long amongst the most prosperous, the most densely peopled in the world.



A CANAL IN BASSEIN

CHAPTER XXVI

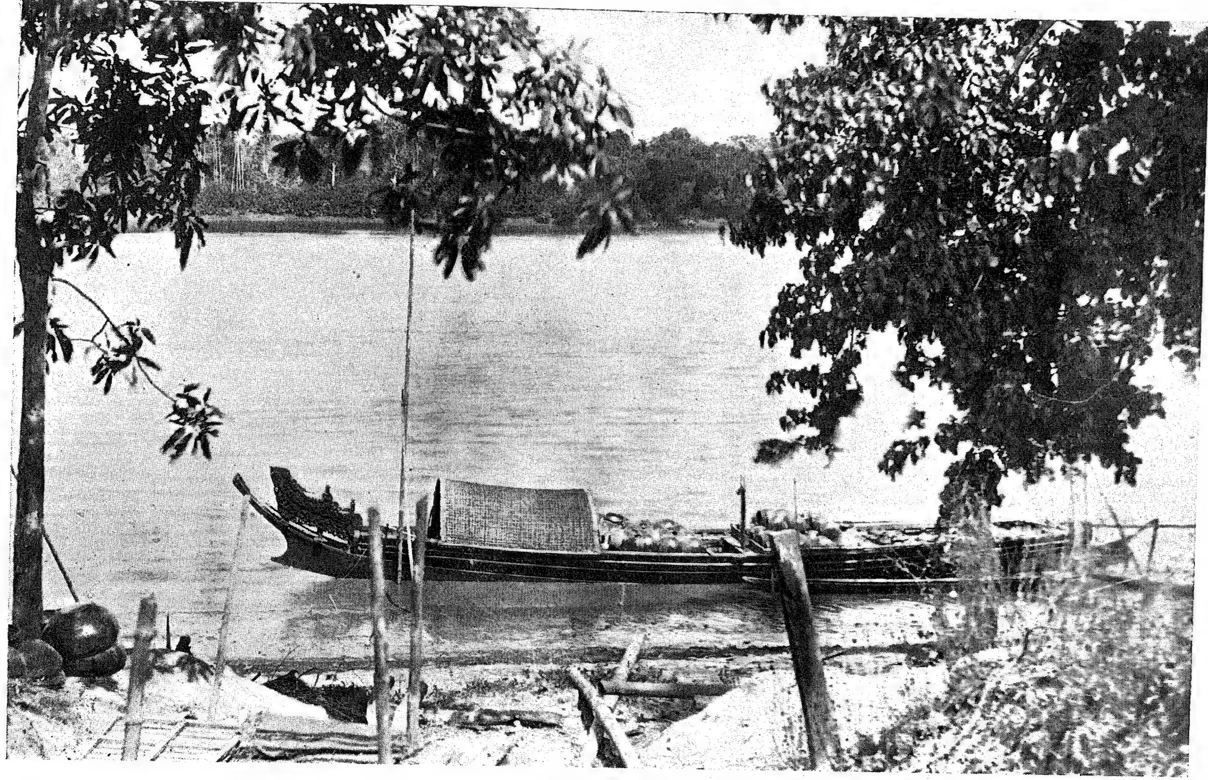
THE POMP OF TRAVEL

THE steamer to Bassein is due at Maubin at half-past one o'clock in the morning. At two, I walk down to the wharf, a cloudy moon overhead. In the porch a crowd of people lies asleep. A little farther, on the open planking of the wharf, my baggage is piled. Beyond, there spreads the silent river. For half an hour I wait here, my eyes fixed on the dark bend of the river down-stream, and looking every moment for the flare of the coming searchlight. Yet I look in vain. It is now three hours after midnight, and all the world lies in the shadow of sleep. As I pass my hand over the railings of the wharf, it grows wet with the fallen dew. Sleep cries out in my bones. At four, and at last, the steamer comes. The wharf becomes alive with the awakened people; but the silence of night still broods insistently upon all things.

The steamer comes slowly alongside, gliding and sidling up to the wharf, and the voice of her muffled engines is like the low bubbling purr of a hungry panther. You have heard it in the jungle? As she touches, the tired skipper, under the glare of the

electric light, turns away with a movement of great weariness, stumbles over the threshold of his cabin, and throws himself on his couch for thirty minutes of oblivion. The mate stands by the gangway-planks, and sees the people come on board. Up and down by the engines, like a caged beast, the patient engineer walks, his face livid under the white glare. There are still two hours to the dawn when the captain wakes, the hawsers are flung on board, and the steamer takes her relentless way into the night.

All next day we thread the winding ways of the Delta, the waters laden with the tide, now level with the plains. For scores of miles neither ridge nor hillock breaks the level monotony. The rice-fields stretch beyond the fringe of the river to the farthest horizon. But towards evening there is a great change. The water-ways are lined with avenues of drooping forest, and the tropical wilderness spreads far into the distance. We pass from the broad highway into narrow, sinuous creeks; sluggish, like gorged pythons. The steamer, with her flats in tow, fills all the available water space, and the tarred flanks of her flats hustle and rasp against the drooping branches of the trees. Ahead, the sun flares in red gold, and the dark tracery of the forest is cut against it. Then the night falls swiftly, the stars come forth in myriads, and the searchlight sends her flame before the ship. Once again all the world becomes unreal. Every shadow deepens, every reflection is intensified. The face of the waters is like a mirror, without a soul; yet it reflects



A BOAT-LOAD OF POTTERY

the infinite deeps of heaven; and the ship floats as though she lay over a bottomless pool of waters. Millions of fire-flies flash in the trees, lighting up their dark forms against the darker sky.

And here there is room for nothing else but the ship. All other craft lie for safety at the creek's mouth till she has passed, and we suddenly come upon them all, drawn up under the banks of Myaungmya, where the homing steamer is also waiting, monstrous and flame-clad, her funnel amongst the palms, for right of way.

At Myaungmya there is now a large population. Boats, carved and gilded and lofty of stern, rise up like shadows along the banks; open-air plays are in full progress ashore; raftsmen lie on the water, and at one point where there is a narrow passage, a protruding raft is rent asunder, as the iron prow of our starboard flat crashes through. We are moving slowly and carefully, but with the momentum of a thousand tons and more. The searchlight flames on the banks, making vivid the swaying palms, the crowded alleys, and the wharves, where Chinamen wait beside the black Coringhi, and Sikhs in *khaki* stand for order. As the steamer runs out her gangways, the crowd surges on board, and coolies, chanting a wild refrain, roll the cargo down the pontoon to the flats. The homing ship, with a clear passage before her, passes swiftly away into the dark world of the forest, and in half an hour we too leave all animated spectacles behind us, and plunge into the silent creeks.

CHAPTER XXVII

LEAVING THE CITY

HIGH noon and a turning tide! The yellow river, laden with its burden of land-creating loam, runs by, and there is a turmoil in the narrow ways between the ship's side and the wooden pier. Scattered over the great stream the ocean-going steamers and the sailing-ships lie at anchor, their prows swinging northward, in obedience to the tide. The foreshore slime glistens in the light. A multitude of small craft ply, or are at rest, in its neighbourhood. Up near the concrete river wall, there are rows of idle sampans lashed to a forest of stakes. Their brethren on the water are busy, and boat after boat sways by, laden with passengers for the other shore. Here are the panting launches, full of a swift vitality; the heavy barges; the red-funnelled river-steamers of the Flotilla; and the Burmese country-boats with half-moon roofs of matting, red and yellow and dark vandyke; and a long perpetual stream of passengers which flows from the shore to the river, along the sloping pontoons that rise with the rising tide and float, or bridge the intervals of slime. Burmese families in silks of colour, and under the shelter of yellow translucent



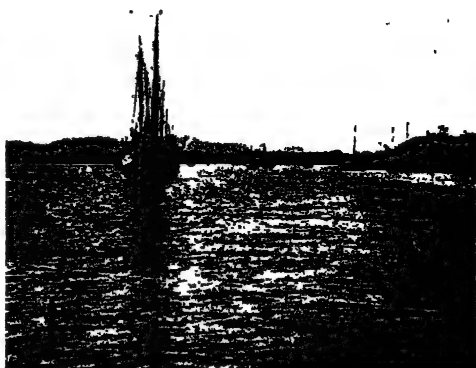
ON THE SOUTHERN COAST

parasols, draw the eye away from the traffic of life to its beauty, and small craft with sails bellying to the breeze, speed across the turbid waters. All that is here is new, deriving but little of its charm from history or old association. Its interest is vital, of the present. Thus as the pageant discloses itself, and calicoed Chinamen, cottoned Coringhi, and silken Burman play their parts upon the sunlit stage, we slip our anchor at Rangoon, and make with the tide for the ocean.

THE NIRVANA OF THE NIGHT

Night comes, and with it a sea of snow under the trail of the flaming moon. A warm-lipped wind from the south, sensuous and caressing, the very breath of

some mystic ardour of Nature, plays over the restless face of the sea. On the white awnings of the ship, the dark stamped outline of the cordage makes fantastic patterns, so clear that the pattern seems an inalienable part of the fabric; yet in each line there is the tremor of separate life. Time and space loom infinite on a borderless horizon, and the ship moves over the trackless seas, as if impelled by some secret, universal spirit of life. The dark man at the wheel, yellow ovals of light from the compass playing on his face; the lonely officer on the bridge; the droning voice of the watchman; the clang of the ship's bells; seem like the simulacra of some hidden reality, phantoms of something else that is.


TAVOY RIVER

DAY UPON THE THRESHOLD

Dawn breaks off the Tavoy coast, a symphony in purple. The sea, the Moscos islands, the mountains of the coast, the violet sky still lit by the full orb of the

moon, prolong the royal note of colour. Heavy purple clouds, children born of the night, lie upon the peaks and in the valleys. As the day grows they gather together and sweep away to sea, the playthings of the red-lipped dawn; or else they sink in soft mists into the valleys where they were born. The ship steers straight for the east, as the risen sun shelters for a moment behind a shield of cloud, his glory effulgent behind it, and manifest in the downpour of gold, and in the cloud's rim of fire. Then very swiftly he emerges, and the colours change; soft niagaras of cloud pervade the secluded places of the hills; pale mountains, scarcely more real than the sky above them, rise up on the distant horizon; and the ship, swinging round, enters upon a long canal of sea, between the mainland and a cathedral island on our right. Flights of pagodas glitter in the sun, and rich woods climb the opposing shores. Fishing boats with square sails on a point trail over the complacent sea.

And it is thus within the space of a night and half a day that I come from the thoroughfares of a crowded, an aggressive, a commercial city, to the threshold of a strange country of nameless islands, of so many fascinations that to escape from one is only to fall into the happy toils of another. In its wooded and unexplored island interiors, in its secluded bays and silent backwaters, in its little valleys of nameless rivers, in its company of unascended peaks, there lies a perpetual appeal to the imagination. And Fame has not yet come with her train to stale their infinite variety.

MERGUI

Mergui, as I see it from the *Ramapoora*, is a narrow strait, with a double-peaked island on one side, and a low, palm-clad shore, rising to a hilly eminence, on the other. On this shore is built the town, a long line of thatched huts on piles along the water's edge. The summit of the hill is crowned with a white pagoda of golden rings and a glittering spire, with monasteries of many roofs, with a great court-house, and the houses of the British officers. A long jetty of rough stone protrudes across the foreshore into the water. Two launches lie at anchor, four cutters, and a multitude of little native craft. While I am yet engaged upon the scene before me, there enters up the ladder a yellow mariner, with a sea-tanned face, a grizzled beard, a straw hat in a white cloth cover and black ribbon, seedy clothes held together by large iridescent mother-of-pearl buttons. His name, he states with a flourish, is Captain Le Fevre, and he launches forthwith into the true adventure.



MARMAGON

"This," he remarks, embracing the settlement in a

wave, contemptuous, of his hand, "this, is a gone-before kind of place; the pearlers made it, and now it is done with, same as Thursday Island, where the Jap is supplanting the white man. You see," he explains fraternally, "they will work for a wage that you and I would turn up our noses at. And now," he adds inconsequentially, "I am a wrecker. Who knows what the next turn in the varied kaleidoscope of life will bring me?"

I suggest good luck, and drink a health to it; on the basis of which he gives me a narrative of his adventures with Thursday Island blacks, and of many things which he declares happen in remote latitudes, but never become known; of the men he has killed, and of the men who have tried to kill him; of "Admirality" charts, and the ways of men upon the seas. He is a good liar, and I am fain to listen to him, here on the edge of the pearling lands and the country of the numberless islands. About noon the rakish-looking craft under his command takes herself off to the salvage of the *Amboyna*, and so, for the moment, exit Captain Le Fevre.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE PEARLING TOWN

THERE is a house, at Mergui on the hill, built half a hundred years ago for the comfort of the European traveller, with a row of convex windows facing the sea; and in all Burma there is no resting-place more attractive than this. It is high enough to command a view of great extent and beauty, but not so high as to cut one off from the sense of human fellowship. The spectacle it offers changes with every hour of the day, and as the tide ebbs and flows, as sunlight and shadow change from east to west, and storm and calm succeed each other on the mutable face of the sea, I, who am its tenant now, know that chance has made me a spectator from a royal box of a great play. I awake of a morning to its splendour, and the spectacle that greets my half-conscious vision is one of a pale sapphire sea, of brown housetops and fishing-boats and tufted palms, suffused in a blue mist of hanging smoke; all seen through a lace-like tracery of green boughs and scarlet opulent bloom. My eyes follow the first gleams of sunshine as they come racing along the under-surface of the leaves, reddening the

dappled wood. From every window there is a view of sea and sky and island, and far down by the foreshore there is the first cluster of human beings, and a flight of wheeling gulls about the fishing-boats that have come in with the dawn.

Just now, in spite of the pessimism of Captain Le Fevre, the town is agog with excitement; if such an emotion can be said to assail a settlement wrapped in Lydian airs, and far away from the highways of the world. Pearls of great price have been found, and every dweller in Mergui believes that he is destined to find others like them. So the populace is going to and fro, borrowing or begging the wherewithal to start in pearling adventure. Olpherts, the little town-clerk, talks of throwing up his place. As it brings him in a hundred a year I am surprised to hear this, and suggest that he has some offer of a greater post.

"No, sir," he replies, "but I am thinking of turning pearler."

I wonder at him, looking upon his slim, clerkly figure and pale little face.

"In fact," he adds with a jerk, "I have already entered the business. Last season I bought a boat and a pump—it was second-hand, but a good pump, sir—and my wife went out and looked after the shells. We found two pearls worth 2,200 rupees, and after paying all expenses made a profit of four hundred. But two months ago my wife died, and the boat is now upon my hands. I cannot work it if I remain here. Last week I sent it out in the charge of the tender, and,



AMHERST—ON THE SOUTHERN COAST

sir" (his eyes grow moist and his voice husky with emotion), "he brought me back only eight shells, but in one of them there was a pearl worth 10,000 rupees."



THE DIVER EMERGING (1)

The statement clothes the little man in a sudden nimbus of glory. So small is my spirit, that a moment before I was thinking only of his rashness in wishing to surrender a certain income for the doubtful chance of pearling, and now I am smitten with the sense of his self-restraint. Imagine a man sticking to his desk, and posting figures all the long day into a futile horde of books, while thousand-pounder pearls are lying under the clear water, in a country of sea-breezes and tropic islands, only a day's journey away!

"I have here, sir," continues the little clerk, "two

pearls, which I did not like leaving at home, as there is now no one there to look after them," and thereupon he thrusts his hand into the pocket of his grey coat, and pulls out—a match-box.

"Heavens!" I think, "he is going to display me his thousand-pounder!" But he denies me the emotion, and produces two pearls of lesser price, and they lie upon the table for an hour, gleaming among his folios, till I beg him to put them out of danger. He informs me that he is not the only lucky person in Mergui that there are six men who have found pearls of price, and that one of these is worth no less than 18,000 rupees. Lindsay the Australian, he says, found one before he left Mergui, which he sold for 17,000. Very quickly after that it was sold for 23,000, and three times after that in Bombay, and each time at a higher price.

"U Shway E, sir, the Salôn trader, has two quart bottles full of pearls, and they say that in the old days before people knew their value, he bought them from the Salôn at one rupee each!"

These pearling grounds have in fact a very recent history. In the 'eighties they were practically unknown In the early 'nineties they were worked by Australian adventurers, most of whom have now departed. The pearling grounds are now leased in blocks to a syndicate of Chinamen, who grant sub-leases to individual adventurers at the rate of twenty-five pounds a pump, for the pearling year. The main harvest is of mother-of-pearl and it is this harvest that pays the working expenses

The pearls are a speculative asset; a glorious and limitless possibility, that sheds the lustre of romance over a difficult means of livelihood.

Over and beyond the lottery of the pearl, there is the gamble and excitement of the blister. You dive, and you bring up a shell. That is good. You open it and you find a blister. Splendid possibility! Many hopes assail you. Does your blister contain a pearl? Is the said pearl matchless in colour and form? Of great size? Almost priceless? Or——? You see,



THE DIVER EMERGING (2)

there is always the fatal alternative. To add a new thrill to your excitement you must now face the matter of its disposal. Will you part with it unopened to some other speculator, pocketing a substantial but very

moderate price, or will you follow your fortune? The whole town is aware of your dilemma, and deeply interested in your decision. Meanwhile, if you are a *gourmet* of the emotions, you will gaze at your blister by day, and dream about it by night. You will receive visitors, you will listen to their comments, and you will laugh disdainfully at the offers they make you. If you are wise you will prolong this golden period, and bask for a season in the warm sun of fame.

But let us say that some day, before it is too late, you sell it. Away goes the speculator, his heart in his mouth, the beautiful iridescence in his hand. The blister is cut open, and there emerges the pearl of the season, or there emerges—nothing!

Thus the flavour of romance lingers on in the air of this pearling town. It is a little paradise of the Celestial, for no Chinaman could desire more than the opportunity it offers of making an ample income by the steady pursuit of business, and of losing it in a sudden gamble.

The European here, with his many pumps and schooners, accumulates much shell, and little pearl. For the seas are wide, and schooners drift with wind and tide. He cannot be everywhere at once. When he visits one of his boats at work, the diver becomes delicate, develops a racking headache, and lies down. The weary pearler sails away to another boat. Then the diver recovers, and his boat drifts out of sight and reach of interruption. When it is found again, and the pearler comes on board, he finds laid out for him a neat row of rifled shells. The jaws of oysters gape

quickly in the sun, and it takes no long time to slip a finger, sensitive to pearls, along the lip of the open bivalve.

The small capitalist, with his pump or two in his own charge or in that of his wife, reaps a smaller harvest of shells, *but he gets his pearls.* And so the white man goes, and the yellow man and the brown man stay and work at a profit.

But let us enter the town, while the morning is still fresh, and call upon some of its inhabitants.

Here is the house of the latest celebrity—the man who has found the pearl worth 18,000 rupees—a Burman. Ascending the stairs at the side of the house, we enter a large square room with many windows facing the street. In the centre there is a round table, with the open shell of the oyster in which this thing of price was found displayed upon it. The walls are hung with oleographs of catholic selection, of the German Emperor, a Franco-Prussian battle, of an old man in a frock coat being kissed by a ballet-girl. Mats are spread upon the floor, and curtains conceal the inner rooms.

The entire family appears, consisting of the old father, a retired goldsmith, the old mother, the son who found the pearl, and the son's wife. They are in the main humble people, but no Burman is ever at a loss for good manners, and the possession of this great pearl imparts to all of them a new air of dignity. The treasure is produced from a small ointment bottle filled with pink cotton, and is deposited on the table.

It is a large gem, the size of my thumb-nail, almost flat-bottomed, but spherical above, displaying a faint series of concentric rings—a bauble of price. It is not yet sold, but the owner has received an offer of 17,000 rupees. From whom? Ah! he does not know! But it is rumoured abroad in the town that he may command that price. Bargaining is a delicate affair, and if you seek a wife or a pearl of price, you begin thus tenderly, floating a rumour upon the air through the mouth of a friend.

Some more talk, and we move on past the bazaar where large-eyed girls sell silk, to the house of U Shway E, the Chinaman with the quart bottles full of pearls. His father, he tells us, piloted the English to Rangoon in the year 1825; and when the English left Rangoon, having "allee fixee" with the Burmese, he, feeling his life might be a troubled one if he stayed, took the opportunity to embark for Calcutta. But long before this, when his father was a younger man, he had visited London, and learnt the ways of the English.

U Shway E's intimacy with the Salôn of the archipelago began when he accompanied Captain Shore to these islands. Since then he has ever been their friend. Every Englishman who has sought to know anything of these strange people has come to him. He supplied Dr. Anderson with many of his facts, and made a census of the gypsies for Master Eales, the Census Commissioner.

This old man of the silvery pigtail and courteous

manner, who has made a fortune out of the simple Salôn, poses as their friend and benefactor. Recently, he says, he asked the Government for a grant of the



A GIRL OF MERGUI

islands, with a view to reclaiming them to civilisation: but the Deputy Commissioner said: "Do you want the Salôn then to be your subjects for ever?" He claims that he has always been kind to them, and has never sold them liquor. It is very true that they have

been harshly treated by Chinese and Malay traders, who have forcibly taken their possessions, and given them little, if anything, in return.

U Shway E's house fronts the street, under the bamboo-clad hillside on which the Roman Mission is established; and the back of it opens to the sea. It is a very dark pile of wooden buildings, sloping away with the foreshore from the level of the street. There are many rooms, and in one of these a small Burmese handmaiden is swinging a child to sleep. While we sit by at a table on which fresh roses are set, and take stock of the neat writing-table at which a Chinese clerk, who talks fluent English, is at work; of the letters and invoices in slips of bamboo, which line the wooden walls; of the water-pots in an alcove, kept cool by draughts of air; of the Burmese women of the household, wives and daughters of U Shway E and his sons; the old man, from an inner chamber, brings out to gratify us the "quart bottles" we wish to see. They are full of pearls of all shapes and sizes, and represent only a fraction of his real possessions. He brings out also a strange collection of the sea-commodities in which he deals, *bêche de mer*, and the shells of green sea-snails.

A boat from the islands is in, and he sends for some Salôn to see us, and three fine young fellows, soft of tread and shy of face, enter and huddle together on the floor. They have broad shoulders, fine limbs, and attractive features. They are dark of skin, and wear brief loin-cloths, and red and yellow bandanas about their heads; bamboo earrings of great size in their ears.

There is an irony in the contrast between their physique and youth, and their timid cowering manner, and their eyes that drop instantly they encounter ours. The moment we turn to some other matter they silently and swiftly disappear. U Shway E leads us after them down some stairs and across a backyard of rough tree-trunks raised high on piles, to the edge of the scaffolding looking out to sea, and there we come upon the whole party at anchor.

There are several boats lashed to the wooden piles, and in each boat there is a group of three or four Salôn, heartily busy with an ample and varied breakfast. They eat as men to whom food is the supreme luxury, and a square meal at the house of the old Chinaman, when they come to Mergui, is one of the links in the system of barter which binds them together. For the Salôn has come a very little way on the road of life. He can grow nothing for himself, and, for all but the natural products of the islands and the sea, he is dependent on some one else. His only home is his boat, in which he lives throughout the north-east monsoon. During the south-west monsoon, he builds himself a little hut on piles; but this is the most temporary of erections, and forms no part of his real belongings. The Salôn boat, a dugout at bottom, is well finished, and admirably designed for buoyancy and speed. Its accommodation is increased by side walls of cork and cane, which begin where the wooden base ends. The oars are very shapely, and end in a blade like that of a broadsword. The boats before us here

this morning are laden with green shells and bags of *bêche de mer*. One of the occupants hands up a spear which is partly of his own manufacture, a rude and primitive weapon of slender bamboo, with a three-pronged head. With this spear he plunges into water after fish, following the weapon home.

As we stand here, on the windy sea-edge of his house, overlooking the gypsy boats, the old Chinaman tells us something of what he knows about them. According to him they are believers in *nats*. As to death, they say it comes from the malignancy of a spirit, and accordingly no sooner is a man dead, than they cut a boat in two and place him between the two parts, and depart hastily, leaving him to the carrion lizard and the wild hog. They all now wear clothes, but very little more than a narrow loin-cloth. Their country is divided by the Government, for pearling purposes, into blocks, and he speaks of them as "No. 1 man," "No. 3," and so forth.

The Salôn here to-day have come from St. Matthew's Island, four days' journey from Mergui. As to their language, it is, he says, throughout the same. They all understand each other. The only difference is like the difference between English and what Captain Leed talkee—— Ah, yes, Sclotch!

"I buy," he says, as we come away to his counting-house, "many more pearls than I sell; but very few now from the Salôn, for the shallow waters in which alone they can dive have been cleared of all their pearls by the pearlers."

For this habit of buying many more pearls than he can sell, and of storing them up in quart bottles, U Shway E is regarded by his fellow-townsmen as a



A LAD OF MERGUI

mysterious character—"a very curious man!" He has also a great store of blisters which he keeps unopened. For one of these, which he shows us, he has been offered 2,000 rupees, but he has no desire to part with it.

From the Chinaman's we go on to the house of a painter, in a less delectable quarter of the town, but find the good man is away at a *kyaung*, gilding and carving. Amongst the wooden piles, under the floor of his house, is his workshop, littered with samples of his craft: gilt wooden figures of mythological beings; paintings of the *zats* being made for an approaching *Phongyi byan*; and pencil drawings of arabesque design. Rude as are the details, there is about this workshop amongst the piles the indefinable air of an *atelier*; somewhat that distinguishes it from a place of purely material preoccupations.

From here to the monastery on the hill, whose gilded spire is conspicuous in any panorama of the town, there is a steep ascent up a long flight of stairs. A colossus of Buddha, under a temporary shelter in the open air, is approaching completion. His body is of brass, his head of gold and silver. The workmen standing on the soles of the Buddha's feet, or seated behind him filing and polishing his brazen limbs, look very little beside him. Some brass shavings are being molten over a green fire with the aid of a pair of ingenious bellows. They consist of two cylinders of bamboo, which stand upright from the earth, and two more, scarcely an inch wide, connected with these, but leading along the surface of the ground to the lip of the furnace. Two light pistons of bamboo, garnished with red cocks' feathers, move in the upright cylinders with the least pressure of the hand, and as they move, drive a fierce current of air through the long cylinders.

The Abbot is busy with his breakfast in a corner of the new *kyaung* where the glass and gold mosaic flames in many colours in the morning sun. His food, which presents an appearance of luxurious variety, has just been brought to him by two lads, in a red basket slung from a gilded pole. A pale woman, of saintly mien, sits reverently in the doorway, glad to think that she is earning merit for the hereafter by ministering to his wants, while the carnal old man, fat with ease and good living, sits on his dais by the window, and moves slowly through his meal.

From the windows of a neighbouring structure, where the gilt catafalque containing the bones of his predecessor, awaiting cremation, towers up to the roof, there is a view of tropical richness and beauty. The monastery is built on an eminence, whose eastern slope is laid out in terraced gardens and orchards crowded with palms and jack-trees, *durians*, *mangosteens*, Liberian coffee, and many flowers. Through the interspaces of the lustrous foliage, there are glimpses of blue hills and monastery spires; a picture of intricate beauty. Adjoining the catafalque, there is a chapel, with golden doors, through whose bars there is visible an interior of barbaric splendour. In the centre a colossal figure of the Buddha sits under glittering umbrellas, and on three sides along the walls there are rows of golden figures. The light, pouring in through stained-glass windows, gleams on these figures, and fills the spacious room with a haze of gold. Outside in the open ante-room, the white walls are frescoed with

pictures of "heaven and hell"; the former insipid and restricted to winged cars and means of swift locomotion, the latter truculent and awful to behold. Here is the chemist guilty of selling poisonous drugs writhing on a heated stake; the maker of implements of war with a hot spear thrust through his mouth; the monk taken in adultery being sawn in two, and very bloody, the woman undergoing torture with outstretched hands, which clutch for support at red-hot iron balls; evil-doers of all descriptions are being flung into cauldrons and kept in place by giants with three-pronged forks, while the virtuous man, with a look that is happily compounded of horror, fear, piety, and conscious worth, looks on from his winged chariot under the guidance of a *nat*. It is comforting to find that the wicked men are always black, and the good invariably white.

From this sermon in colours, we move on to where the Chinese joss-house, with its winged roof, its dragons and lobsters cut in profile against the sky, testifies to the importance of the Celestial community. We enter, to find a dozen lads at school under the tutelage of an old priest. They are seated at a long table under a frescoed wall, which depicts the adventures of a traveller with a turbulent white mule—some Celestial Stevenson afoot. Along the wall, in picturesque covers, there are hung letters and cards of invitation, sent, it would seem, to the joss-house priest. The scholars under the stimulus of our presence rise to perfervid heights of zeal, intoning their lessons in shrill voices, that make the incense-laden air vibrate with

learning. They are pleasant almond-eyed lads, with boyish faces, till they begin to declaim, and then their faces, with uplifted eyebrows and airs of immense concentration, suddenly become like those of the strange people you see on a Chinese vase. The old priest brings in cups of tea, and every one is very obliging and civil. It is a little world in itself, with its own subtle atmosphere of distinction, and it is a whole nation away from the sunlit street, into which we step directly from it. For the Chinaman ever carries a fragment of his country with him, and in his temples, at least, never perpetrates the monstrous architecture to which the Englishman abroad too readily succumbs.



CHAPTER XXIX

THE ARCHIPELAGO

I. A Page from the Past

IT is a natural transition from the pearling town, with its notable past, to the island country that spreads away beyond it, far into the territories of the sea. Of all that has happened amongst these islands since men first came to live and move amongst them, there is no record, and there never will be any now. Here and there only the curtain of the unknown is lifted for a passing moment. Their main, and it would seem their earliest, human interest centres in the fast-dying colony of the Salôn, which has made of these islands its last refuge. When or whence they came, one can only guess; and whether they had any human predecessors it is difficult even to conjecture. But it is probable that they are an extremely ancient people, kindred of that aboriginal stock which peopled the mainland before the advent of the Htai. The main body of these aborigines drifted away under the pressure of the Htai to the south, there to develop into the Malay race. A fragment of them retreated to the shelter of the islands; and there, cut off from civilising influences, they have made no pro-

gress, and, too weak to face their adversaries, they have developed the nomadic life, the habit of few possessions, of flight at the sight of a stranger. The attrition of time and the cruelty of man have worn away the race to its present proportions, and its complete extinction is now at hand. It has too long bowed down its head, too long ceased to make any effort after greater things, to have any future before it. The Malay who is of kin will acknowledge no relationship, and in times that are past he has been its most cruel oppressor. The fire of Islam, which has molten the Malay into a people, has never warmed the aboriginal Salôn. A great gulf of time must therefore separate them, and these islands must have known the Salôn for far more than a thousand years.

THE VISIT OF CÆSAR FREDERICK

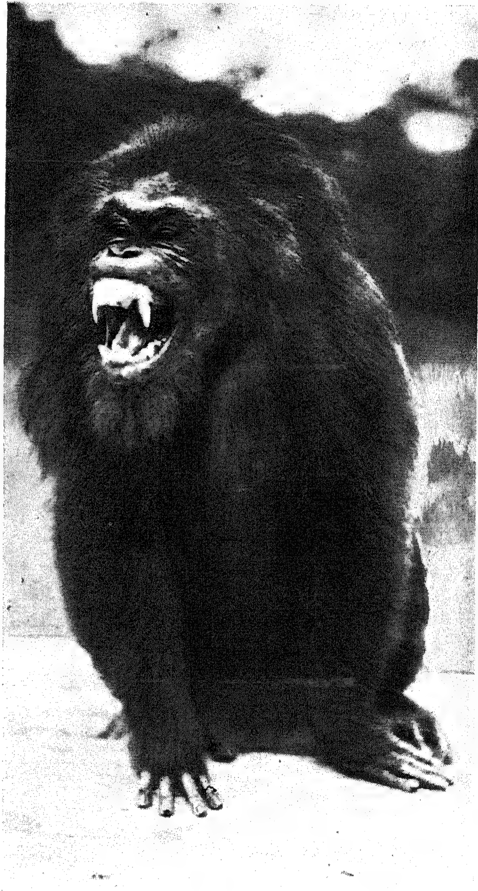
Almost the first account of the archipelago, written by a European traveller, is that of Cæsar Frederick, the Venetian. It has all the romantic charm and interest of early travel; and can only be told to any purpose in his own words.

"From ye port of Pechineo," he says, "I went to Cochim, and from Cochim to Malaca, from whence I departed from Pegu eight hundred miles distant, that voyage was wõt to be made in twentie five or thirtie dayes, but wee were fowre moneths, and at the end of three moneths our Shippe was without victualles. The Pilot tolde us that wee were by his altitude from a citie called Tenassiry, a citie in the Kingdome of Pegu,

and these his wordes were not true, but we were (as it were) in y[e] middle of manie Islands, and manie uninhabited rocks, and there were also some Portugals that affirmed that they knew the land. I say being amongst these rockes, and from the land which is over against Tenassary, with great scarsitie of victualles, and that by the saying of the pylate and two Portugalles, holding them firme that we were in front of the aforesaide harbour, we determined to goe thither with our boat and fetch victualles, and that the shippe shoulde stay for us in a place assigned; we were twenty and eight persons in the boat that went for victualles, and on a day about twelve of the clocke we went from the Ship, assuring ourselves to be in the harbour before night in the afore saide port; wee rowed all that day, and a great part of the next night, and all the next day without finding harbour, or any signe of good landing, and this came to passe through the evil counsel of the two Portugalles that were with us.

"For we had overshot the harbour and left it behind us, in such wise that we had loste the lande, enhabited with the ship, and we twentie eight men had no manner of victuall with us in the boate, but it was the Lordes will that one of the Mariners had brought a little Ryce with him in the boat to barter away for some other thing, and it was not so much but three or fowre men would have eaten it at a meal: I tooke the government of this Ryce promising by the helpe of God that Ryce should be nourishment for us untill it plesed God to send us to some place that was enhabited, and when

I slept I put the ryce into my bosome because they shoulde not rob it from me: We were nine dayes rowing alongst the coast, without finding anything but Countries uninhabited, and deserts Iland, where if we had found but grasse it woulde have seemed Sugar unto us, but wee coulde not finde any, yet wee founde a fewe leaves of a tree, and they were so hard that we could not chew them; we had water and wood sufficient, and as we rowed, we could goe but by flowing water, for when it was ebbing water, we made fast our boat to the bancke of one of these Ilands, and in these nine dayes that we rowed, wee found a cave or nest of Tortugals egges, wherein was a hundred and fortie fowre egges, the which was a great helpe unto us: these egges are



MERGUI ARCHIPELAGO: A DENIZEN OF THE ISLANDS

as big as a hennes egge, and have no shell about them but a tender skinne, everie day wee sodde a kettle full of them egges, with an handfull of ryce in the broth thereof: it pleased God that at the ende of nine dayes, wee discovered certaine fishermen, a fishing with small barkes, and wee rowed towards them, with a good cheere, for I thinke there were never men more glad than we were, for we were so sore afflicted with penurie that we could skarce stand on our legs. The first village that we came too, was in the Gulfe of Tavay, under the King of Pegu."

For the subsequent experiences of the travellers, and the fortune of the ship left behind without a boat to help her, the reader is referred to the original of Messer Frederick.

THE PORTUGUESE TRACE

His adventures occurred about the year 1567, and it is certain that at that time the islands were well known to the Portuguese. For it is on record that a fleet of Portuguese ships sent by the Viceroy of Goa about the year 1545, to search for an island of gold in the Bay of Bengal, found it in a manner, by taking to piracy and preying on passing vessels from the shelter offered by the archipelago. "For eight months and more," says Ferdinand Mendez Pinto, "our hundred Portugals had scoured up and down this coast in four well-rigged Foists, wherewith they had taken three and twenty rich ships, and many other lesser vessels, so that they which

used to sail in those parts were so terrified with the sole name of the Portugals, as they quitted their Commerce, without use of their shipping; By this increase of trade the Custom houses of the Ports of Tanancarim, Junçalan, Merguim, Vagarun, and Tavay fell much in their Revenue, in so much that those people were constrained to give notice of it to the Emperor of Sornan, King of Siam, and Sovereign Lord of all that Country, beseeching him to give a remedy to this mischief, whereof every one complained."

The king despatched against the pirates a fleet of "five Foists, four Galliots, and one Gally Royal," under the command of a Turkish adventurer, named Heredrin Mahomet; and "Within these vessels he inbarqued eight hundred Mahometans, men of combat (besides the Mariners) amongst the which were three hundred Janizaries, as for the rest they were Turks, Greeks, Malabars, Achems, and Mogores, all choyce men, and so disciplined that their captain held the victory already for most assured."

The Portuguese were nevertheless victorious. "The dog Heredrin Mahomet was slain amongst the rest, and in this great action God was so gracious to our men, and gave them their victory at so cheap a rate that they had but one young man killed, and nine Portugals hurt."

Piracy has in fact ever found the archipelago a happy resort.

In later days Ilha Grande, now known as King's Island, was bestowed on the French by the King of

Siam, and might have become, with its ample bay, an important settlement. But it was never used, except in later days by French ships of war, during the wars between England and France, as a place from which to attack and capture British merchant vessels; and as a place of refuge, when British ships of war were abroad.

THE *ESTHER* BRIG

Almost the first English attempt to navigate the islands and prepare a chart of the archipelago was made by Captain Forrest, whose "Journal of the *Esther* brig, from Bengal to Quedah," narrates how, in 1783, he was driven amongst the islands by the monsoon winds, and gave to many of them names (which they still bear) "in remembrance of Friends whom I Honour and Respect," and others "according to striking appearances and figures."

The ardent Helfer spent a whole winter here in 1838-9, shortly before his death from an Andamanese arrow. Since then many persons have visited the islands, and more than one fruitless effort has been made to reclaim the Salôn to Christianity and civilisation. But little has been done towards the complete exploration of the archipelago. Its islands number over four thousand, and they range from bare rocks to rich territories like those of Kisseraing and King's, susceptible of the finest cultivation. Their fauna include elephants, rhinoceroses, and tigers, and the whale may often be seen plunging amidst the calm of their interior seas.



DENIZENS OF THE ARCHIPELAGO

II. En Route

The launch, with loud heart-beating, drives a pathway through the narrow strait. Turning our backs upon Mergui, now hidden behind Patit, we reach a space of green, sun-touched water, with low mangrove swamps upon our larboard bows. Upon our right the mountains of King's Island, cloven to a third of their height by dark lines of swamp forest, reach with their apices up to the heart of the swooning clouds. We are steering south by west for the island country, and the most notable object in view is the pyramid of Merghi Island, sixteen hundred feet above the sea. Nearer, several islands lie in our way, outlined in solid forms against the misty blue of their lofty companion. Away under the opal sky there is a narrow mirror-like calm, which makes the islands in its compass seem unreal mere phantoms of the vision suspended between earth and heaven. In striking contrast, the sailing-boats of the coast-fishers are cut in black patterns against the clouds.

But no two consecutive moments present the same spectacle. The clouds melt from one ecstasy of beauty into another ; the sea, played upon by the wind, is one instant billowy and placid as oil, another crimped with laughter, a third a meadow of diamonds in the sudden sun ; and the brave launch, leaping forward, overcomes space, so that the dreamiest island fast becomes a reality, and the most palpable one of woods and precipices a dream. The sailing-junks, with their

double diamonds of black sail suspended above their small hulls, fill the spectacular eye with their grace; reminding one that man has never invented anything more in harmony with nature than a sail.

And presently we fall into company. The junks, driven by the wind, come up in a great flight, with the *aplomb* of a bevy of portly matrons, all ribbons and bosom; the wrecker, very surly and dirty, overtakes us on the starboard, flinging silver foam from his bows; and in the offing I get sight of the first Salôn boat moving to the impulse of a small white sail. The wrecker looks evil enough for any trade, and as he leaves us behind him in spite of all our pace, reminds me of a big cur in a run after Jack, outpacing my gallant, little panting fox-terrier, all heart and pluck, but too short, dear fellow, in his legs to keep ahead. No matter; we will come in yet.

The Salôn here is eloquent of the irony which relegates this country of beautiful islands to an abject and dying race. Their rich luxuriance is beyond belief. They look as if they were forests sprung from the bottom of the sea. There is scarcely an inch on them that does not teem with life. There are islands of such length and altitude, that they might be portions of a continent, for all that the eye can tell; and there are happily others that are palpable islands, with the sea in a ring all round them, waiting for some one to give them a name. And out of the misty void each moment new islands are born, like the stars on a summer night.



SALÔN ON CANTOR ISLAND: FIRST LESSONS IN CIVILISATION

As the afternoon grows we steer for a silver strait, all molten and a-fire, between blue island portals. And passing through them, we come up a wide sea, Ross and Elphinstone in long mountains on the west, Burnett just behind us, and Merghi Islands hard by on our left, dark blue, with a narrow lane of sea between, and faint purple ridges beyond. It is a lane that tempts one to enter. On Cantor, a brief way ahead, with single palms in outline on its crest, there is a settlement of Salôn learning, or trying to learn, the hard alphabet of civilisation.

As the afternoon wanes and earth moves up against the sun, the islands that have been every colour all day, from tropical green to a misty northern blue, turn to their proper purple. In the east a heavy curtain of velvet rain blots out the main of bay and peak and cove ; but elsewhere each island stands out distinct in its own serene personality. Nearest to us now, and happily appropriate to the season of this voyage, are the Christmas Islands. The sea is billowy, undulating, tumultuous almost. In a bigger ship this would pass unnoticed, but the *Marguerite* is a small craft. We are steering directly for the Criddles in twenty fathoms of water, but the gunner has his eye on a sunken rock. Soon we shall turn away to the south, to anchor for the night in the bay of the *Amboyna* disaster. The white clouds above the rain purple of Morrison's Bay catch the lessening light, and fling it down upon the sea, which straightway becomes silvery as though the moon were up. Between Court Island and the Criddles there is nothing but the western sea.

And so we come upon

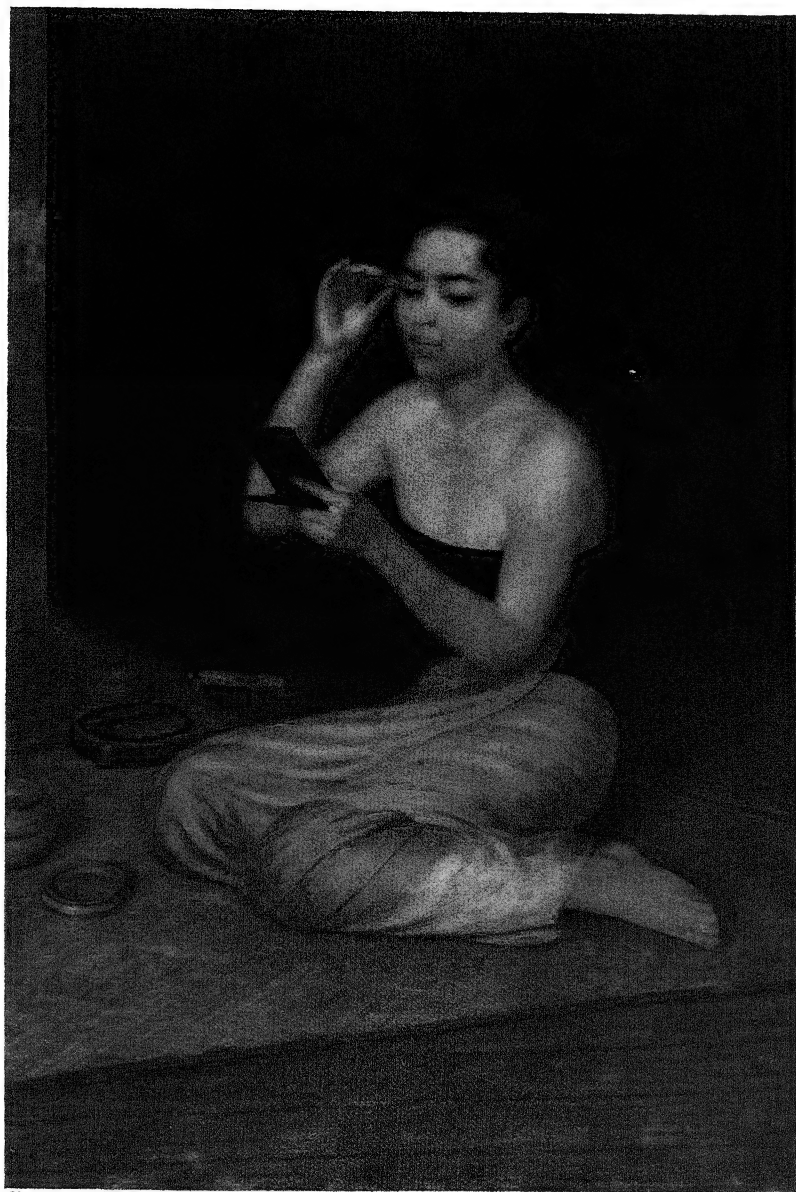
THE GLORY OF THE CLOSING DAY

The golden light stealing out from under the clouds sends a long streamer of fire down the sea; fills with lightning a diadem of cloud that sits upon the brows of the Mew Stone, and swiftly turns that island, purple a moment earlier, into such a haze of supernatural flame as the eye cannot dare to look upon. It is flame cut in flame, and no more an island.

In a little while the pageant is over. The great world swings up like a porpoise in the sea; the sun's last arc of fire is swallowed in the void, and the Mew Stone, in the instant of its passing, becomes the darkest purple under the firmament. For a roseate haze still lies upon the edge of the sea, and the clouds in a great circle catch up and reflect the fragments of prismatic colour into which the pure sunlight is now broken. The sky becomes a palette, the sea a pool of pink. And as the grey closes in, the patch last touched by the sun grows iridescent as a pearl, in waves upon waves of blending colour.

Beautiful as is the day, there is a subtle and deeper fascination in the dark.

The world closes in, and leaves me the centre of a new universe. I seem by some miracle to have been brought here into the midst of these lonely islands, and the panting, dauntless engine that has brought me seems like another carpet of Solomon magically put at my service. For, a month or two ago, I was afoot in



From a painting by J. R. Middleton.

A GIRL PAINTING HER EYEBROWS.

the greatest of cities, a straw on the driving tide of its life; and this morning I was on shore, near a court-house, a prison, and a town; and now, I am at sea, in the company of nameless shadowy islands, being swiftly borne away upon the bosom of the dark. A star shines out on the horizon like a beacon or a light-house, larger than any star I have ever seen; the grey clouds drift like phantoms in the wake of the departed sun, and each moment the constellations grow in multitude and splendour.

Steering by instinct through the pitchy night, we cast anchor at last, in the wake of the wrecked *Amboyna*; and the speculative salvage-man in blue garments and naked feet comes on board to tell me how he has fought with Chinese and Malay, been prisoner and escaped; how he has lived for three and thirty years in the East, and has a wife and children in Scotland, but finds folk at home cold and indifferent to one who has spent his life abroad.

I pass the night on the floor ot the launch with nothing between my vision and the stars. The sea is but a yard below, the roof shelters me without shutting out the heavens. All my world for the time is about me; the gunner, the sea-cunny, the engineer, and the crews. And here on the trackless seas, the sentiment of common humanity surpasses all lesser considerations. The same conditions affect us all alike.

Some time in the night I wake, and my eyes are dazzled by the lustrous moon, hung up in the firmament above me. I sleep again, and wake to find the

messengers of day abroad; lictors with their fasces, who fling themselves upon the world, and bid it prepare in beauty for the coming of their lord. Strung along the east, there is a chain of islands, each link a mountain pyramid, the pale sea between crinkling with the first breeze of the dawn.

The first familiar object that greets me is the *Marguerite's* gig in the wake of the golden dawn; the crew in her fishing with lines. Far away in the distance a ship is passing silently, like a phantom amongst the islands.

III. A Morning with the Salvage-Man

Turning to look about me, I find that we are at anchor in a small bay, which lies but half awake in an arm of Bentinck Island. As the sun climbs, the island turns a rich golden green, its beauty reflected in the olive water. But for a wisp of yellow sand along the sea-edge, its entire face is covered with woods of the finest character. Little valleys run down to the sea; a thousand birds are singing their unfamiliar matins to the day, and trees with long white trunks shine in the light, and break up the mass of foliage into aisles, making the island seem like some Gothic cathedral, wrought in an Oriental texture. A few paces off lies the dishevelled wreck of the *Amboyna*, her funnel, once black, now rust-red in the sea air.

I make my way on board, climbing with some effort through the trenchant air, to the upper deck. Mr. McPhairson in blue clothes cut all of a piece, like

the garments in which infancy is wont to pass its nights, is on board, tanned and ruddy, grizzled, large and weighty of hand and foot, smoked glasses veiling his small, blue, dogged eyes.



McPHAIRSON

"You don't notice a smell?" he asks—"a kind of effluvium?"

Candour and courtesy conflict in my mind.

I admit that I do.

"Ah," he replies, a little troubled upon the matter, "I was just wondering if it was away, or that I was growing accustomed to it a bit."

Half of her was under water. The fore-end of her was out of the wet, and a Chinese carpenter was at work drilling large holes in a plank. On the hurricane-deck—the captain's walk—the pumps were busy, and the glass face of the indicator, like a ship's clock, showed the pressure under which a man was working twenty feet below the level of the sea. A long tube

of gutta-percha led away across a hoarding built of planks over the sunken middle of the ship. At the edge a strange man in blue, with a Chinese hat, was standing, acting as a human pulley for the tube. Another sat holding a rope connected with the diver's helmet. Yet another held the tube of air—*the life-line*—and let it slowly slip through his half-closed hand, With head bowed down and hands outstretched, he was, I could see, concentrated in the delicate work that was his. There was something electric in the slow rustle of the rope through his nervous hands. And he had in his keeping the life of the man below, in the blind water.

To my unaccustomed eyes there was nothing visible but a hoarding below the surface, and a tube let into the water, but the silent men, clustered in the daylight above, knew well what was afoot below. Old McPhairson, the speculator, interjected occasional remarks. "He is walking now, along the lower deck," as the line suddenly ran out.

"Eh, but he is in the hold away below now, lifting the cargo," as a few bubbles rose to the surface.

"He would be about there now," pointing to a white stanchion out of the water; and then quickly, "Here she comes," as a sudden turbulence in the water and a rush of air bubbles heralded the approach of a sack of cargo.

"Chillies," he observed sententiously, as a party of red skirmishers rose up, and spread out in a fan on the water, to be followed by a black and rotten sack,



THE HUMAN PULLEY

which a waiting man with a large pole thrust away to sea. In this way rice, chillies, prawns, and tobacco came up and floated away, the bay becoming alive with them.

McPhairson, who goes down frequently himself, said the prawns cut his skin, and he pointed to his red scarred feet.

Silently a diver came up, had his iron helmet lifted off his collar-bones, and sat dazed and dull in the sunlight, shivering in the gills. Another took his place.

"They get mortal cold down there," said McPhairson.

"It's a warm day," I said.

"And may it continue so," he replied; "for the water takes all the heat out of you down below, and the wind cuts you when you come up. The other day, when it was a bit cold, every time I came up I had to get them to wrap me in a blanket."

All this time there was an anxious manner about the man. *His launch, the wrecker, and Captain Le Fevre had not yet come in.*

"And the Lord," he said, "knows what has become of her. Oh! but, if she is wrecked, there will be a shindy at home, when her owners come to hear of it."

At last the laggard hove in sight.

"There she is," I said.

"Time she was," he replied. "I have passed but a poor night because of her. If I am so fortunate as to get this job through successfully, I will never again undertake another like it. I am fifty-five the day,"

he added, mopping his strong face, "and not the man I was." Yet he looked a man of iron.

The wrecker came up; the captain with unkempt hair, and blue shirt flapping outside his trousers, blowing his last anxious instructions through a speaking tube to the engine-room below. The mate, with a big hand, which he used with emotion, and bare feet in white canvas shoes, out at toes and heel, stepped on the hurricane deck of the *Amboyna.* He spoke, encouraged by McPhairson, with anger and contempt of his captain. Clearly in this triumvirate Le Fevre was in a minority of one.

"Hect," said McPhairson, "he is that sort of man who can neither lead nor follow. A coward, sirr, always on the look-out for what he don't want to see; a-dreamin' of rocks ten miles inside his course. Phew!" he added, sweeping his ruddy face with a blue bandana, "and to think of the night I've spent."

McPhairson by his venture stood to lose two thousand pounds, or win a competency. Long after, I heard with regret that he had lost.

IV. The Pearler

Steaming along by South Passage Island we come suddenly upon a Salôn camp. There is a fan of white sand, with some boats and huts upon it, and I can see a few men and women moving. By the time I can step ashore—and it takes no more than five minutes

over the transparent water—they have all effaced themselves in the primitive woodland, and only one man remains, looking ill at ease. The sea-cunny goes with him, shouting, to the woods, in the hope of inducing the others to return. The encampment consists of three boats and three huts ; but to call them huts is almost

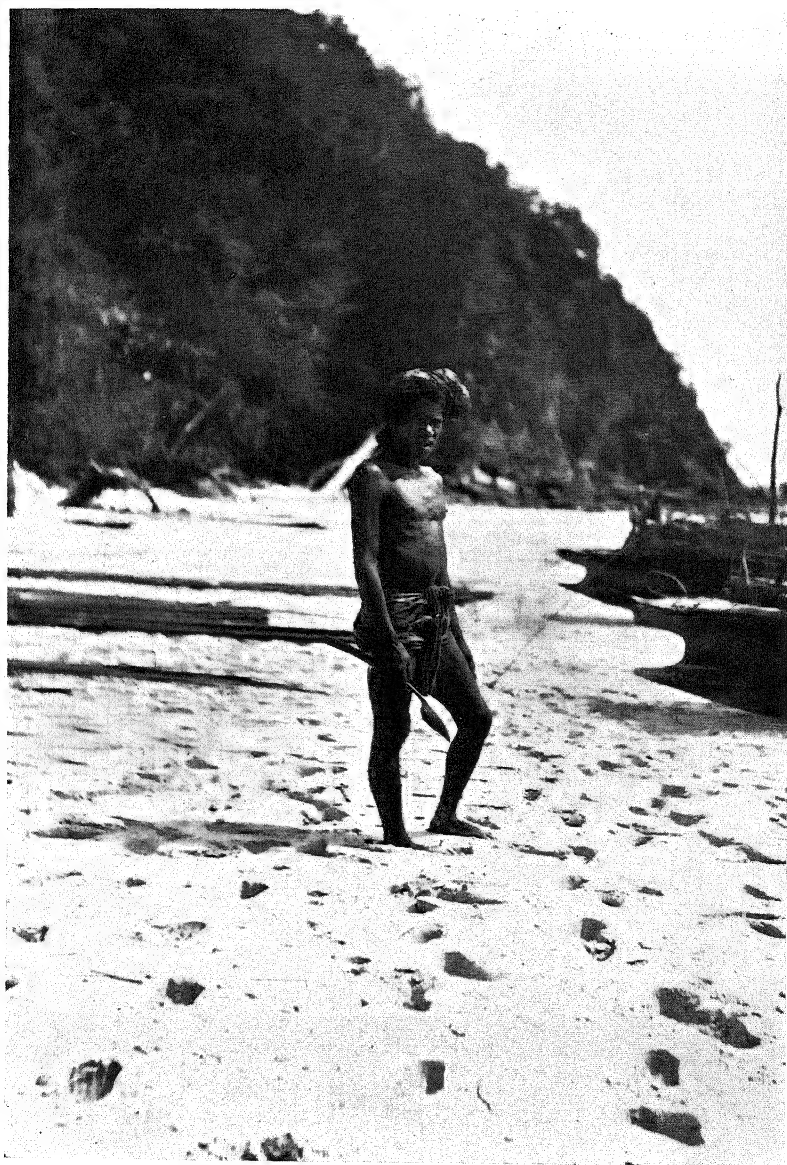


THE CAMP

to misname them, for they are, of all human habitations, the slightest. They consist of a few thin sticks —I can count six upright and three laid horizontally in one—and a frail pleated mat laid over the top. A mat of bamboo strips is spread on the white sand within. Some of their few possessions are scattered around ;

bags, baskets, and bedding of mat, and other articles showing some contact with civilisation; large Pegu jars, Chinese bowls and plates, a knife or two, an old beer bottle full of wild honey, a couple of wooden boxes—that is all. The spectacle that spreads beyond is of a purple lake, studded on its circumference with blue islands. The sunlight dances on the water, the sea hurtles very gently against the white sand, bees hum in the motionless air, and a bird pipes in the brake. From the deep recesses of the woods comes faintly the voice of the sea-cunny, calling to the trembling hidden people, without avail. It is a dreamy, soft, and beautiful corner of the world, oceans away from this morning's bay and the Scotchman with his divers at work. The *Marguerite* lying at anchor in the offing, and puffing clouds of white steam against the purple seascape, looks like the denizen of another world. The shimmering heat plays a fugue before my drowsy eyes . . . I turn with an effort to the realities about me.

The white sand is marked with the footprints of the colony. Its only representative stands half-cowed with fear, a deep, dull suspicion lingering in his eyes. He is a short, strong, black-skinned man, with a sparse moustache and no beard, a loin-cloth and bandana, both red. He tells the sea-cunny that they came here yesterday, and that they will leave as soon as they have collected enough of a palm with which to renew the upper portions of their boats. It is fiercely hot, and the sea-cunny says the heads of the Salôn



THE ONLY INHABITANT

infants grow red in the sun. They live rough lives, and die hard.

Leaving Bentinck Island and the perforated rock, we steer directly for the Sisters. Islands bare as Sark lie upon our right, fantastic of form. One is like a Japanese eagle, another like a palace, a third is like a cathedral in the distance.

For the first time now, we come upon a pearler, sweeping slowly with long oars, along a line of shadow, under the precipitous flanks of Maria, most northerly of the Sisters. These islands nearly all stand clean out of the water, and look as if they had no interiors, but only summits to be climbed with difficulty. The first of the boats I see is the property of Olpherts, the little clerk ; the second, of the German Hertzog. The sea is placid as blue marble, swaying with the first beat of life. Black rocks show their fangs in the sun, and deep pacific harbours lie between the islands. Between Maria and Elizabeth, where the rocks are strung in a line across the strait, there is a wonderful blaze of sea.

The pearlers, more numerous now, are scattered like islands on the sun-steeped ocean, and with the aid of the telescope I can tell if they are at work, from the dark figure of the life-line man erect at the stern.

As we gradually approach I find that four men are working at the pump wheel, two with their hands and two with their feet. A man at the oar is slowly propelling the boat in sympathy with the buried diver, and two men stand silhouetted against the sky, one



THE DIVER BELOW



HIS JAPANESE HEAD

at the life, the other at the head-line; the latter the tender and leader of the boat.

For some little space of time we wait, listening to the monotonous screeching of the wheel; then the rope tightens, the tender hauls, a burst of bubbles is borne up in tumult to the surface, the tenders run swiftly together, and the diver, like a strange beast hooked up from the sea-deeps, emerges and clings to the ladder over the side of the boat. And there he lies, bent over, the type of exhaustion. The crew hasten to raise his helmet, and, lightened of its burden, he steps on deck, his startled Japanese head showing out of his monstrous clothes, his eyes blinking with the change from the deep floor of the sea to its sunlit surface. In a small brown net, like those which old ladies use in England when they go a-shopping, lie the shells he has found.

We move on, and I find Allingham in the midst of his boats, a pile of shells about him. He uses a big flat blade, and peers as he opens the shells into their lustrous depths; flinging the meat with its food of live red prawns into a bucket of water, which he afterwards searches with fingers skilled with usage. When he has gone tragically through the entire pile finding nothing, I descend with him into his cabin, garnished with bottles of sauce, a rusty tin containing a few pearls, an iron safe, an open shell with the mark on it of a rifled pearl, a pipe or two, a tin of "Navy Cut." Enters the German Hertzog, brusque, keen, and intelligent, curiosity written large in his eyes. For the coming of the *Marguerite* is a riddle to be solved. Meanwhile we lie at ease, on the cabin roof, and get the launch to tow us to the *Bertha* at anchor in an island shelter. They talk of a Salôn camp assembled in the neighbourhood, and as we go, I see their fleet of boats making away across the water, in the wake of a double-sailed Chinaman, who has come to trade and barter.

It is evening, the closing hour, and there is a general movement on the seas. The pearling-boats are coming in to their rendezvous beside an island, the home of the edible-nest builder, which from its strange picturesque outline is a landmark to them all. It is nearly bare rock, but at its corners trees droop over the sides, like parasols, and it is so much like a Japanese picture, that I give it, in emulation of the worthy Captain Forrest, the name of O Mimosa San.

The last pink of the sunset turns the sea between the islands into ribbons of exquisite colour. Cliffs and precipices rise up about us, and in their shelter we anchor for the night.

I spend an hour on the *Bertha*, listening to the pleasant German talk of the pearler's wife.

"Ach," she says, speaking of the islands, "when I



O MIMOSA SAN

camen heere, I did think I could never wonder enough. Nicht Mark? Oh, but they are so beautifully."

While we talk the pearler cleans and searches his shells by the lantern-light; in all he does, a man of character. It was he who wrecked the *Amboyna*, for he has a master's certificate; but he sits here undaunted in spirit. And he holds on while the Englishmen go, one by one, because he knows how to make an income



THE DIVER COMES UP

in many ways. He takes photographs of the islanders, and sells their skulls and skeletons to anthropological institutes in Berlin. He took home a pair of ourang-outangs for which he asked 20,000 francs. One died on the way, and the other, as his wife says, "did sigh with his head in his hands; oh! so sad, for one of his own nation." A year ago they found a pair of dwarfs, and took them away to Germany, where they are now famous, and a source of unascertained income to the pearler and his wife. He has sent for whaling tackle; and is, in short, a man of ability. His wife is a plump, bright-eyed, brown-faced girl, with some English which she has learnt since she came to these seas, and many pretty Germanisms. She talks well, and is full of appreciation of every kind of beauty, and what she calls "the Nature." "Ach Gott!" she says, speaking of the archipelago, "but it is so beautifully. It do make such a théma fcr the letters home."

Allingham, a red man, sad and bashful, sits on a stool, and offers a word here and there.

They talk of ambergris and whales, and divers' risks; of two recent deaths from the snapping of the tube (the life-tender hauled hand-over-hand, but not quick enough to save his man, who came up dead, and black in the face); of divers half-paralysed and scarce able to walk, who still dive; of one who, tired of life as a cripple, shot himself; of the man whose helmet being unadjusted let in the water (he signalled, but was kept down, being supposed nervous, and ulti-

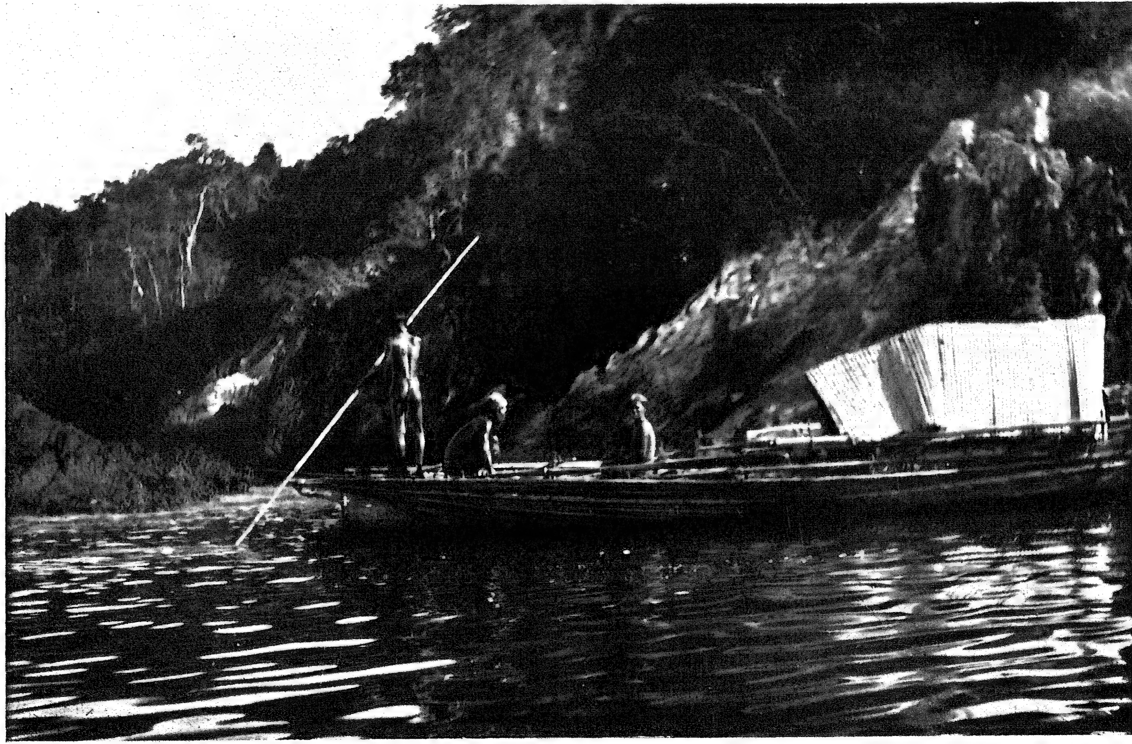
mately came up, dead); of one whose head swelled up, so that they could scarcely remove the helmet. The diver's life in these seas is a risky one, short, riotous, lucrative; and there is no lack of apprentices to the trade. And so as we talk, the German, finishing his work, falls back into a long armchair; the poultry in the hen-coop cackle, and fill the air with the scent of feathers; the schooner's dog, still wet with the sea, dozes under the lantern's light; a kettle boils on the hob in the cabin below, and oars splash in the darkness, as boats go to and fro. From the distance there are borne upon the swaying sea the voices of the assembled crews, in song, in laughter, in the telling of strange tales before they sleep.

"Well," says Allingham mournfully, "I haven't given up hope yet. From now till April there are still four months to run, and who knows what we may find."

She.—"Oh, but England is already—what you say? —internatsio; but in Shermanie they do think much of a tiger-claw necklace. Nicht Mark?" and at intervals she says soothingly: "So—o" . . . "So—o."

V. With the Salôn

During the night the launch and the schooner *Bertha* developed an intimacy, and the dawn, as it came stealing over the seas, found them linked in an embrace of their anchor chains. When at length we got away, the day had broken, and we steered into the lake of water between Jane and Charlotte, and thence across



A SALÔN BOAT

the sea to Bushby in the track of the departed gypsies. In the far distance I could trace the smoke of their moving fires, and the gleam of an oar blade as it caught the sun. Skate were flapping about in the sea, and a shoal of small fish leaped and plunged, pursuing and pursued, the war of nature incessant under the smiling surface of life. The Sisters, all blue and green now, lay strung in a line upon the western sea, and O Mimosa San was fast fading out of sight. The "Father and Son," a solemn couple, greeted us on the south. I hailed the Chinaman as we came up to him, and he sent off a present of green-snail shells, and a polite message to say that the Salôn would rendezvous in his neighbourhood in the evening after the day's work.

The green-snail shell is a beautiful object, deep sea-green without, white and iridescent within. All the beauty of the sunset is by some subtle miracle of nature caught and imprisoned in the mould of this deep-sea dweller. And so, as we went on, I came upon the Salôn, in the green water, under a rocky coast. There were several boats, and from one a man with a Burman air about him, a very merry fellow, signalled to us to come up, that he might look upon us. In the boats before me there were men and women, children and boys; but the young unmarried girls must have hidden themselves away, for I could see none. The children were of a fairer complexion than their parents, and all but the very youngest were at work, with oar or punting pole. The most attractive child of all was a little girl on the verge of womanhood, bedecked with beads, and

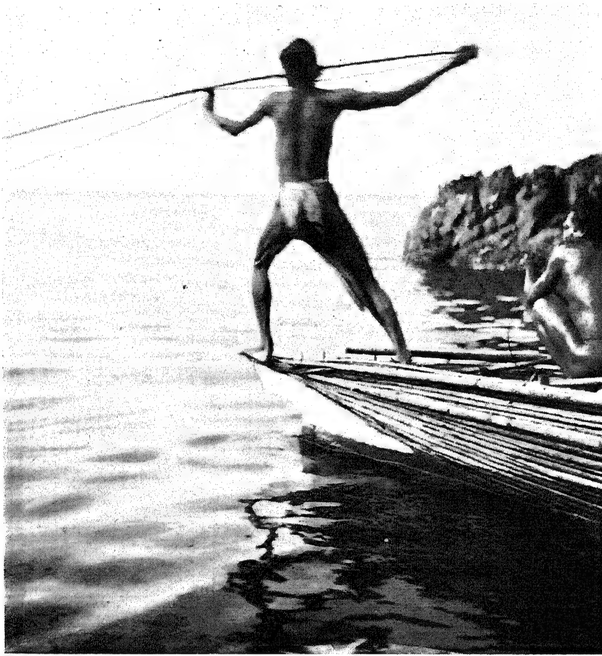

THE GIRL

swathed in a single garment of blue cloth. She had brown eyes and dark ringlets, and was so frightened at being photographed, that she broke into tears, and was with difficulty reassured. As it was, the tears lay in a rim about her eyes long after she had ceased to cry; and she could not be persuaded to resume the pole, which she used at the prow of her father's boat with infinite grace. Behind her in the recesses of the boat crouched her grandmother, a midnight hag—type of the terrible old age of the Salôn woman. I do not suppose that there is anywhere in the world any one more ugly than an old woman of the Salôn.

HARPOONING

Some of the men plunged with harpoons, to show me how they did it, and the exhibition was greeted with

peals of laughter from all the assembled boats. The harpooner before plunging strains forward, every muscle taut, the whole weight of his body resting on the ball



THE HARPOONER

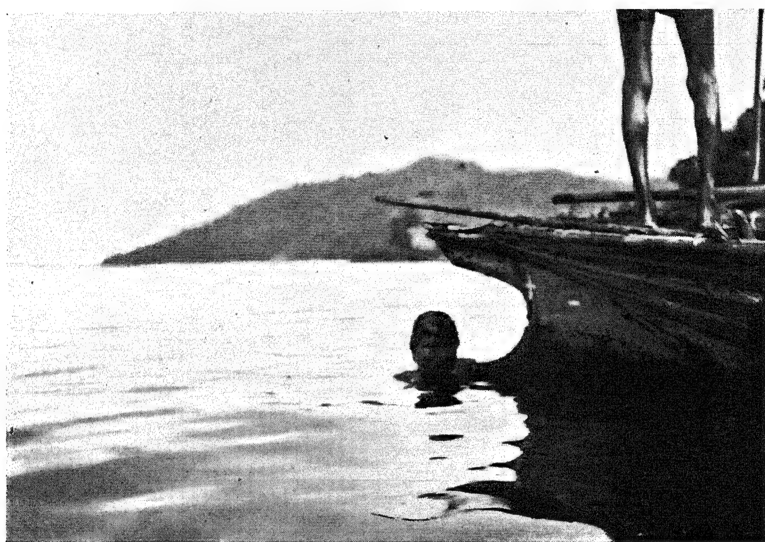
of his foot—a missile incarnate. Then he flings his harpoon with a whirr through the sunlight, and leaps after it into the water. Spear and man are lost to sight. A moment later, he comes up with dripping hair, clutches the cut in the shapely gunwale, and climbs

with swift action into the boat. When engaged in the serious business of fishing, the Salôn spears a large fish, like a skate, which lies upon its back in the water, paddling with wide fins. When the agitation reaches the surface and is caught in the straining vision of the fisher, his boat flies forward, and the harpoon-man, poised on its prow, plunges swiftly, on seeing the white stomach of the fish, and drives home his weapon with the weight of his body. This done, he loosens the spear-head from the shaft, and climbs back into his boat, now speeding over the water in the wake of the maddened fish. Gradually its strength fails it, its speed slackens, and it can go no farther. Then it is hauled on board, cut into strips and dried in the sun.

The Salôn dive also for pearls, but only in shallow water, now rifled for the most part by the regular pearler.

"But Lord! there was a time," as the old sea captains say, "when good pearls could be had for a pouch of tobacco." That was when the Salôn had his island seas to himself, and knew nothing of the value of his pearls. But the coming of the pearler has brought enlightenment, and with it scarcity, and the Salôn, when he does find a pearl, can invariably sell it to advantage. The *bêche-de-mer* is caught by him in baskets of rattan, trailed slowly over the muddy shallows. It is dried in the sun, and looks unappetising enough; but when it is soaked in water it becomes like a clean white jelly, and makes a soup that is esteemed good and delicate by the Chinese *gourmet*.

When you think of the Salôn's place on the ladder of human life, of his limitations, his approaching extinction, you pity him; but he has his compensations. His toil is to his liking. He is ever plunging in the warm transparent water; or chasing the wild hog with his dogs. Save that he must live, he is burdened



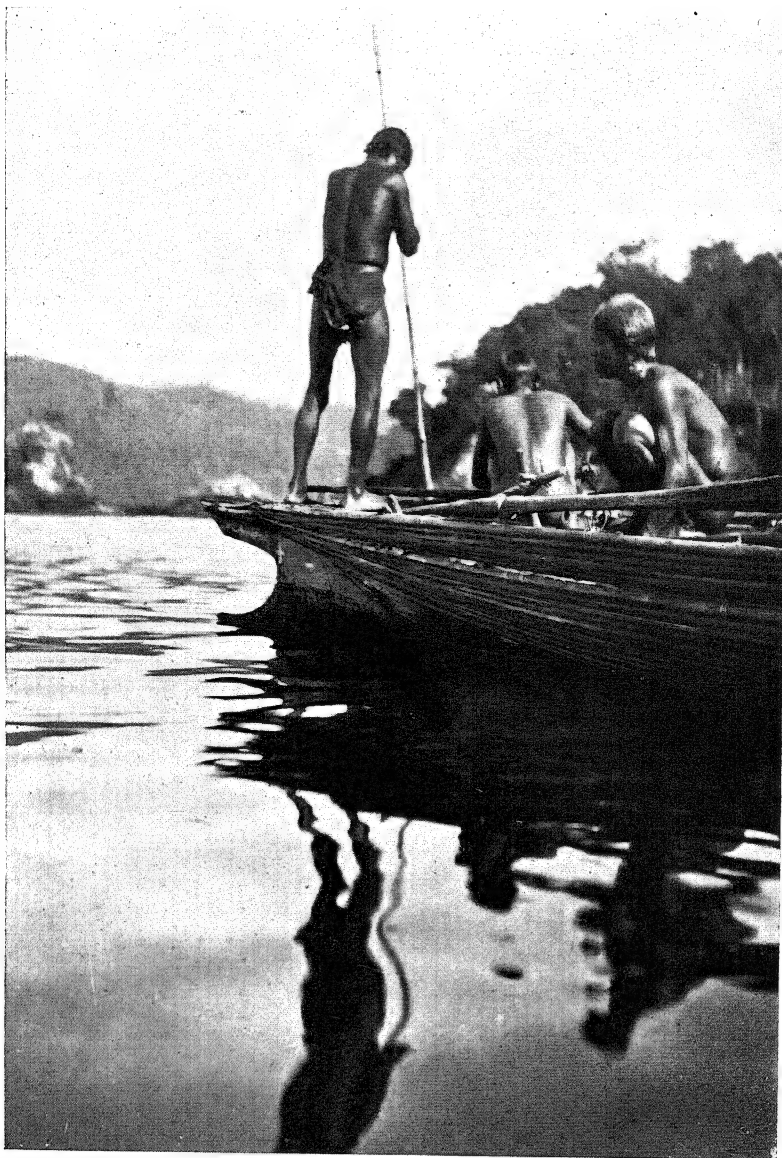
THE HARPOONER COMES UP

with few cares; and he lives withal a free, wild, and unfettered existence. That must be dearer to him than the sordid drudgery of his brother, learning here and there the slow lesson of the primitive tiller of the soil. As to schools and so forth, who on earth would willingly exchange the sunlit water, the white sands, and the wandering life, for the finest school in existence?

And religion? his immortal soul? It is true the poor Salôn is limited in his religious notions. He is much concerned with the devil, whom he finds active in many uncomfortable forms; he has glimmerings of a good spirit, whose power is unhappily, he finds, usurped by the devil. But the world that might teach him is itself oppressed with these burdens. Asked where the spirits of evil reside, my cheerful friend to-day, stretching forth his hands, replied: "Everywhere; in the sea, in the air, in the forests, in the mountains; sometimes behind one island," pointing vaguely to Eliza, "sometimes behind another," pointing to Jane. He spoke with conspicuous gaiety at the moment, but a mental weariness crept over his eyes, as he answered my unfamiliar questions. He grew bored, and his fellow at the prow of their boat began to unfasten the cane that bound it to the launch. They were beginning to think me a dull person.

I hastily changed the subject, and with revived interest they came on board the launch, and looked into the engine-room and the cabin, making long-drawn, clicking sounds, expressive of a certain limited wonderment. The engine-room, they said, was hot, the sleeping-places very fine, and an inner room, only partially visible through a half-open door, filled them with a sense of mystery.

The ship, they said, moved with a screw; but they couldn't say what made it revolve. One man was full of cheeriness and curiosity, now that he was released from the toils of theology, but the other was dull.



PUNTING

Even in these early stages, there are marked differences between man and man. When I suggested that now they were bound to the launch, I would take them away with me, they showed a fine alarm, and the dull fellow began again rapidly to unfasten the cane that bound us together. They were as quickly reassured, and laughed at their own timidity. They could hazard no opinion at all of what the white man's country might be like. Being gently led back to the way of cross-examination, they said that when any one died, it was due to the malevolence of an evil spirit. They stayed with the dying man to the last, and then laid him out on a platform of canes on piles, after which they went away and never came back. All the people, they said, wept when any one died. Of time they had no conception beyond that involved in the succession of darkness and light, and the changing of the dry and wet seasons. They could tell nothing of any one's age. They live only in the present, looking neither forward nor back. Once a year, as I learnt at Mergui, they change their habitat, from the western or outer side of the islands, to the inner or eastern side. This is at the time the north-west monsoon begins to blow, lashing the unprotected sea into fury. In the turmoil of the long-drawn battle between wind and wave, which lasts from May to October, there is no place for the frail craft of the Salôn, and he lives for the most part, with his boats drawn up ashore, in the sheltered inlets on the eastern face of the archipelago. Testimony to this double life is written on the face of the islands;

and there is no contrast in nature more tragic or complete than that between the Gothic calm, the tropic splendour of the island woods, which look towards the rising sun, and the torn, storm-wrought landscape that faces the western sea and the fury of the winds. Thus on a calm winter day, when the sea is billowy as oil, one is confronted on turning the point of an island with a strange picture of an embodied gale. There is no ripple on the sea, and the woods are still and silent, yet they seem shaken in the grasp of a pitiless and furious storm. It is as though a god had stilled for ever the blast in the climax of its rage.

VI. With the Devil

Bidding our Salôn adieu, we steer across a blue, oily sea for the Elephant, a monstrous group of rocks rising in sheer cliffs out of the sea. On our left other islands deploy in long lines, broken by deep and narrow straits, inter-island lakes, and sweeping bays, which recede to blue mountains in the distance against the opal of the sky. Every corner tempts us to go round it, and look for some yet uncaptured beauty; and that is one secret of archipelagian charm. You are never at the end of its mystery. You feel that satisfaction cannot come to you till you have explored every strait and island; and when you have done this, you must of need begin it all over again, because of the infinite variety which comes of the ever-changing perspective, the play of sun and wind, shadow and cloud.

Elephant Island, as we approach it nearer, surpasses



From a painting by Mrs. Otway Wheeler Cuffe.

A PAGODA ON THE ROAD TO MOULMEIN.

all other objects in interest. It is the wildest, most stern and romantic of all the islands I have yet seen. Its dark walls rise straight from the rim of the green, motionless sea, and the lowliest footing on it seems to be five hundred feet high. Its crest is like a series of sharp iron teeth. A few trees find, by some miracle, a foothold on this forbidding exterior. Purple jelly-fish with streaming beards swarm in its neighbourhood, and small fry leap in terror out of the sea about it, like fireworks of silver. A low dark line at its pedestal marks the limit of high water. The passages between it and its satellites are like the fiords of some inferno, and the transition from its shadow into the sunlight is as quick and sudden as the transition of a solar eclipse. Its black sides stream with milky cataracts of lime; dark caves lead into its bowels near the sea-rim, and in them, reaching away into blind interiors of the rock, the edible-nest makers build their homes. It is a terrible, picturesque place, worthy of a Salvator Rosa. A great echo resides under its bastions, and the launch's heart beats near it with a muffled roar, that borders on the supernatural.

Such are some of the impressions made by a first circumnavigation of this island—and at some distance, for the launch approached it at her peril. To make a closer acquaintance I caused the launch to anchor, and made in the gig for a small strip of yellow sand, the only visible landing-place on the island. This brought me unexpectedly into a circular bay, of which a fraction only was open to the ocean. The water here was an

opaque green, the colour of *vert-de-gris*. The harsh grey cliffs towered high above its edge, their sheer sides wonderfully made a foothold by the sago palm, and a few straggling shrubs. Skirting the curve, I came upon a cave, black and yawning, with huge bulbous stalactites depending from its roof. Some thongs of a creeper, hanging downwards, showed that the place was used by the Salôn for tying up their boats. In this dark and lonely place the swallows were building those nests that furnish a soup for the *gourmets* of China.

The air within was hot and close; the stalagmites and projecting bastions of the cave were covered with a mosaic of shells and other marine life. The water lapped the cave, with a hoarse, long-drawn sigh. It is impossible to communicate the horror of the sound. For the cave seemed like some evil monster, on the far outskirts of sentient life, dark, blind, and awful, swallowing up its tribute from the sea. Big jelly-fish floated by into its recesses, and I discovered, with a disagreeable sensation, that a strong current was making for the low-hung lips of the cave, along which the hapless fish were being borne. Looking back from the tense gloom of the cave, my eyes turned with relief to the open landscape of the world outside; to the beautiful reaches of luminous water, to a small island framed in a sky of pink cloudlets, slowly drifting with the wind; and I emerged from the cave with a feeling of sheer physical relief.

Outside, the strip of yellow shell-sand that had

brought me so far, offered its smiling hospitality. I was soon at ease in the buoyant water. At such a temperature, rich, refreshing, and cool! I had come, it seemed, upon a bathing-pool of the gods. On such occasions the spirit reverts by subtle cadences to its primitive youth ; the youth, not alone of the individual, but of the race. So it came that I swam about, and lay on the yellow sand, just covered by the lambent



THE CAVE

fluid, wondering at the new view of the world that comes to one who lies upon his back and looks out across the level face of the sea. I shouted to the world and laughed, and raced against my dog, who was

scarcely less infected with delight than I was. And the sea-cunny, who had come with me in the gig, ran to and fro, flinging his casting net for minnows.

But the sand, we found on subsequent inspection, was patterned with curious traces. The bathing-place of the gods was an alligator pool!

"Wah," said the sea-cunny, staring at the prints on the narrowing sand, while from the cave there came the sinister booming of the tide, "wah—it is a place of devils, a Shait an-Ka-Jagah."

The sea-cunny, for it is time to introduce him, is an elemental man; with sinews and a chest of iron, a square jaw, a deep, harsh, baying voice, and bloodshot eyes; a splendid figure of rough manhood, destined by nature for the piratic calling of his ancestors, but yoked by fate to a civilised life, and now a desperate assistant in any cause that appeals to his sense of loyalty.

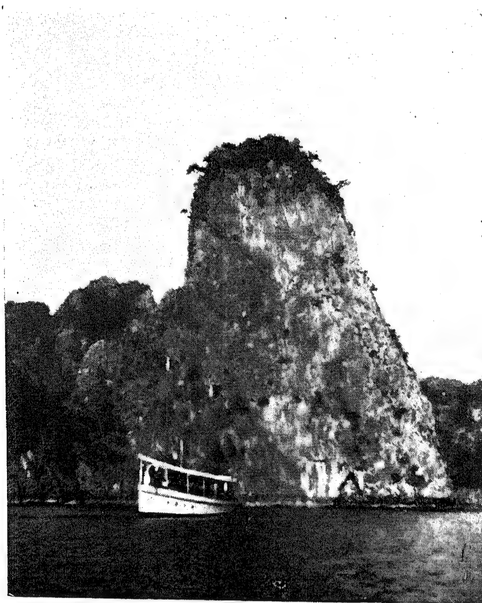
Taking to the gig, we made for the opening of the bay, and had nearly come out of this strange cauldron of devilry and beauty, when the conviction came upon me that the massive bastion of rock under which the cave lay was part of an outer defence, and not the main wall of the island fortress. "Allah Khuda!" said the sea-cunny, rising to his feet in the swaying boat, "there is of a surety something on the other side." Some trick of the slant fading sunlight revealed to us, in a moment, what we had failed to see during the hours we had been looking upon the stony face of the island. Late as the hour was, we turned with a common instinct to the exposing

of its mystery. Rowing slowly under the forbidding bastions of rock which offered no foothold, we came at length upon a place up which a man might venture to climb. It was inhospitable, but the sea-cunny was not to be restrained. While he was away, lost in the gathering dark, I rowed on to the cave, and there flung into the blind water objects which I meant to go and look for on the far side of the island, in case there proved to be an exit for the flood now visibly being swallowed into the recesses of the cave. My plans were obliterated by the harsh roaring voice of the sea-cunny, which, coming from afar, filled the dark vault about me with its echoes. "God," I heard him calling; for the man was frequent in his appeals to heaven, "I have found it. There is water, water, a lake within." Leaving the boat to the lascar, I climbed up the face of the rock. It struck up on all sides in thin fluted pinnacles, like the columns of an ant-hill. "*Churry-Ké-mafik*," said the sea-cunny, tapping one large pinnacle with his hand, and it rang like metal.

"Allah," he said, "but they are sharp. If a man were to fall here—*Bus Khatas ho giya*" (There would be an end of him). Allowing for his picturesque phraseology, there was in fact some trouble in climbing. It was nearly dark, and the only means of ascent were offered by these sword-edges of rock rising one above the other.

By this means I came, before the night made seeing impossible, to a glimpse of what the sea-cunny had discovered, a lake of opaque green water set in an

inferno of cliffs and precipices. A stone flung by him as he poised himself on a knife-edge of rock blobbed with a dull sound in the still water. We climbed down after this and reached our boat, the sea-cunny bleeding at his feet. We rowed, the sea-cunny loyal and contemptuous of protest from the less keen Chittagonian, all in the dark, half-way round the island, on the chance of finding the exit of the waters. The island towered above us into the starry sky, and each time the blade of an oar ploughed the inky sea it flung off a cloud of phosphorus, which floated away like a jelly-fish on fire. We were all by now fallen under the dominion of the dæmon of the place. The sea-cunny had no longer any word to say; and we rowed in silence. For my part I have never before or since felt so deeply the truculence of nature. And even now, as I sit and look out on the stars and the heaving sea, I cannot shake off the pervading horror of this place. I


AN OUTER BASTION OF THE ISLAND

seem to have lighted upon the secret home of the very spirit of evil. They call it Elephant Island, but that is a name bestowed by a stranger from afar. There is nothing of the elephant about it at close quarters. It is purely diabolical, and the whole is a palace of the devil—a cathedral of wickedness. Every time I look into the night and see these sinister pinnacles and revetments outlined dark against the stars, I am assailed by their awful suggestion. Even the wash of the sea, so pleasant at other times, and in other places, is here of sinister purport, like that within the cave of some blind, gross being of another world, into whose jaws life is drawn unresistingly and without hope or power of escape.

It all comes, no doubt, of the eccentric action of water on limestone ; but the explanation counts for less than nothing here. Are not all impressions of nature, in a material sense, illusions ?

And now think of this infernal interior of the lake we have found, of this dark cave under its colossal propylon of rock, hidden away in the heart of this smiling archipelago. Who would suspect its existence if he were not told of it ? And if there be such things in one island of these seas, what may there not be hidden amongst its thousand fellows ?

VII. The Hidden Lake

Last night the sea-cunny, untiring in adventure, sailed away through the night in search of a Salôn camp, whose fires shone like pinpoints in the dusk. For it

seemed probable that the Salôn could pilot us by an easier route to the lake whose existence we had discovered. The first light of the dawn showed me a Salôn boat lashed under the bows of the launch, the sea-cunny in possession. We climbed once again up the sharp pinnacles, and looked on the hidden waters; but descent to them on the farther side was impossible. We turned back, somewhat torn as to our hands and feet, and rowed away to the cave, as interesting as it was the night before, but less tragic now in character. The hoarse lapping of the sea was still there, but the sun, stealing in under the stalagmites, counteracted its suggestion. The water was now a beautiful translucent green, and the roof was lit with dancing water-gleams. The Salôn informed me that, through this cave at low water, I could enter the hidden lake. In the direction of the passage, still invisible, there was silence; the roar came only from the blind walls, where the sea could find no entry. Through this passage the sea enters and retreats, and the evil genius of the lake gorges and disgorges daily. At spring tides the mouth of the cave is filled to the roof, and there is no passage.

Coming away, till the waning of the tide should serve my purpose, I made a tour of the island, and entered another cave, called Gwa Chee Boh. It lies to the east, and is overhung by sheer and tragic cliffs, from which great stalactites depend, threatening to fall upon the intruder. Long ropes of rattan, leading up into secret places, and now rotting with half a year's disuse, show that the cave is visited. The Salôn on being

questioned disclaimed, with a sort of awe, their ever exploiting these cliffs for nests. They were too ignorant, they said, to find the nests, and too fearful of falling



AT VICTORIA POINT

down from the great heights, to attempt to do so. But the Malay come twice a year from Pulo-Penang and climb up. They bring dammer torches with them, and remain within the inner cave ten days, getting shut in there by the sea; and collect six gunny bags of nests. It is a fearful place, where men fall and are killed. Formerly it was worked by Burmans, and the cave is named after one who fell and broke his back here.

The sea-cunny, who extracted this information by slow degrees, sent torth volumes of amazement at hearing that for ten days the Malay went in and came not out. And it is easy to picture the wild scene within, when these men are at work; the roaring echoes that

fill and resound in the dark vaulted cave, the glimmer of the dammer torches, the daring climbers far up in the pitchy recesses, the whirring of a thousand wings, the sea beating hoarsely against the blind walls of the cave!

As we went on grey egrets skimmed the water like phantoms before us, streamers of colour, reflected from the cliffs, painted its lustrous surface, and silvery showers of fish, driven up to the light for their lives, flashed in the sun. The Salôn tried with their spears, under the shadow of the walls, where larger game lay concealed, and the sea-cunny toiled up steep places after delicate orchids, plunging back into the sea, and spluttering and laughing like a child.

At noon, from the launch, there became visible a faint pinprick of light in the cave, and I knew the way was open at last. It was dead low water, and the bay, as we rowed across it to the cave's mouth, was lean from the depletion of the tide. The cave from the same cause had quadrupled in size, and its roof, under which I had stooped to enter, now rose far out of reach above my head. Water still dripped from it as we advanced, and green and scarlet weeds and berries flung a colour over the interior. The sinister murmur of the lapping sea was stilled, but every sound we uttered gathered a deep and monstrous intonation from the vaulting of the cave. A cool wind blew through the narrow aperture, as, lying on our backs in the boat, we pushed it forward with our hands against the roof. Beyond its darkness lay a sheet of pale green water and a world

of sunlight. Steering slowly through the devious passage, we emerged at last upon the lake. Its walls rose up, sheer and steep, in a million pinnacles of rock, to a height of a thousand feet. Save the low-browed passage by which we had come, there was apparent neither inlet nor exit. The waters lay calm, unruffled, and still. The blue sky gleamed overhead. It was hard to believe that we were here in the midst of the ocean.

The Salôn who accompanied us led me to a cave that lies at the south-east corner of the lake. The approach to it was heavy with slime and all the strange débris of the departed tide. From the deep gloom of the inner hall, the swallows flew out in swarms, and high up from invisible recesses came the million-fold "*chuck-chuck*" of the nesting birds. A strange creature, with prawn-like lip, beady eyes, and twitching antennæ, the whole pose of his body indicative of vigilant dread, advanced with his shell on his back across the slime. The place seemed fitly peopled with such creatures as he. As I climbed back into the boat, a young python in the water stole away swiftly in the effort to escape unseen. The lascar at the boat's prow struck him with an oar, and pinned him down to the muddy bottom. He wriggled free and made a dash for the rock, but meeting a wall, which he essayed with impotent fury, he came by his death.

The lascar moralised on fate. It is the Musulman's favourite text. "See," he said, as the vivid coils lay broken in the bottom of the boat, "his hour had come,

and we came here this day that his destiny might be accomplished." The Salôn, with expressive action, stated that great pythons lived in the cave, and on the island. The Malay, who come here every year for the swallows' nests, and hold a feast on the rocks at the cave's mouth, never kill the python, considering him in some way associated with the spirit of this inferno. The Salôn come here to spear the devil fish, and slay a giant lizard that frequents the island.

The tide was now running in, and the waters of the lake were beginning to rise. Having no taste for an enforced detention within its walls, we made for the passage, and shortly after emerged on the open sea, where the launch lay waiting for us; and the crew stood wondering where we had been. The lascar and the sea-cunny each had his tale to tell. For no one on board the launch had ever, in his twenty years' experience of these seas, heard of the hidden lake.

* * * * *

Leaving the shadowy battlements of the island behind us, we steam up Celerity Passage, wooded Domel, the isle of honey, on our left, and a low country of brown sandy flats and pale swamps on our right.

Towards evening we attain once more the island country, and the sun sets in a blaze of salmon-pink between Money and Trotter, touching with its light the crest of Rosy, far away in the purple distance. The anchor drops, and there follows the peace of the long evening. The launch ceases from its hard

throbbing, the fires are put out, and the embers pale. The tired crew, one by one, drop asleep. Almost the last sound that breaks the stillness of the night comes from the sea-cunny's voice, as he retails his adventures, and goes over in bold picturesque terms the incidents of the morning.

A single lantern burns at the stern. A world of dark sea, and starry sky, and the shadowy, immense forms of islands brooding on the horizon lies about me. I am glad that there is no one to break in upon my solitude. For in the dusk and the silence strange



AT VICTORIA POINT: THE SOUTHERNMOST LIMIT OF BURMA

thoughts move through my mind; thoughts that are luminous one instant, faint and dark the next; revelations of the firmament, and sudden lights into the dark places of the human spirit; hints of a world plan, faint tremors of a Creator's will, fading convictions of the destiny of life.

It is not at such times of loneliness, nay, of fellowship with elemental life, that the heart feels its isolation. The true home of loneliness is the great city, as one of profound intuition long since pointed out. *Magna civitas, magna solitudo.*



CHAPTER XXX

MOULMEIN

MOULMEIN is the most beautiful town in Burma. It is one of the oldest British settlements in the country, for it passed into our hands three-quarters of a century ago; and for twenty-five years it bade fair to be the capital. But the conquest of Pegu made Rangoon a British possession; the fitness of its site for a great city far surpassed that of Moulmein, and in a little while, Moulmein, unable to keep pace with its powerful rival, fell back. It stands at the mouth of the Salwin river, and commands the timber trade of the interior; but Rangoon is supported by the Irrawaddy, which bears nearly the whole of the trade of Burma. Between the two cities there never can be any serious competition. Yet, although the hopes of Moulmein were long since broken, and although its atmosphere is one of decay, Moulmein has probably seen its worst days. As time advances it must share in the general movement that is taking place throughout the country.

It has practically no past. It is a product of British rule, and it is less a centre of Burmese life than any other town of its size in the country. And yet, no one

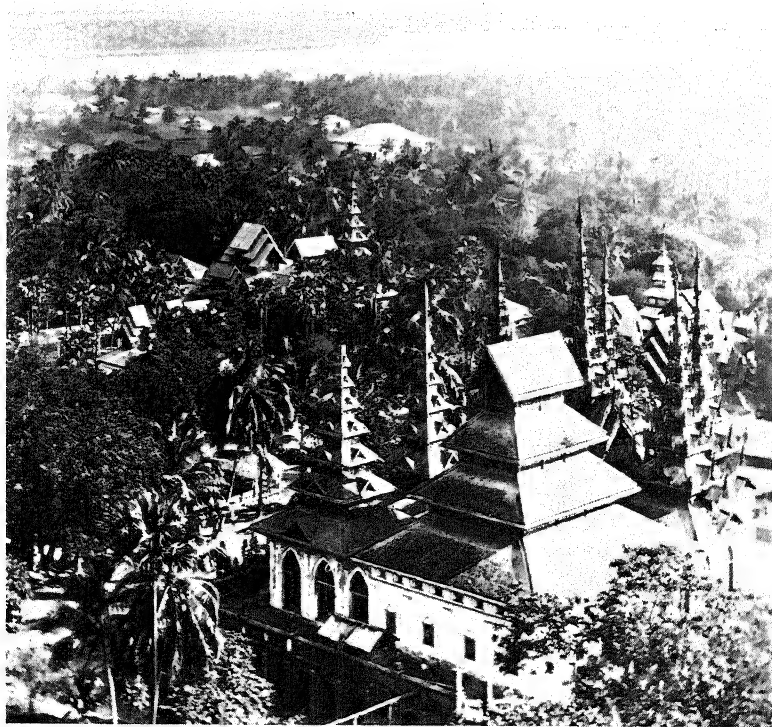
who has lived in Burma would willingly forget it ; for its old-world air, for this very sentiment of failure that clings to its atmosphere. It is a place to which old clerkly pensioners retire when their life's work is done. Rangoon, they will tell you, is too great for them. Lesser towns are prone to be too small. Moulmein, with its colony of resident Europeans, its friendly and



AN ISLAND IN THE SALWIN AT MOULMEIN

unpretentious ways, its temperate climate, and its cheap living, makes a special appeal to quiet people.

When it came into British hands three-quarters of a century ago, it was scarely more than unreclaimed jungle. Yet it was not wholly unknown in the great days when Pegu dazzled the imaginations of men, and Martaban, its neighbour across the water, was a vice-regal city. "Some of the Peguans," wrote the Jesuit Pimenta, early in the seventeenth century, "in this time had with the Siamites' help brought the Castle of Murmulan into their possession, whom the king besieged



WHERE THE GYAING AND THE ATTARAN MEET

a year together. And the Siamites coming on them unexpected, overthrew his armie, killed his Horses and Elephants, slew and drowned many, took others, and so became Lords of all that Countrie. And many Peguan Peeres fled together, whose wives, children, and families, the King after his manner destroyed, utterly



ON THE PLATFORM OF THE PAGODA

with fire, sword and water. And thus the whole tract from Pegu to Martaban and Murmulan was brought to a wildernesse."

When the southern coast became a part of the British Empire, there was some question as to whether its capital should be placed at Amherst or at Moulmein. Military reasons decided in favour of Moulmein, because

of its neighbourhood to the Burmese fortress at Martaban, and the power it gave the British garrison of defending the left bank of the Salwin from aggression. But military reasons have long since ceased to have any weight in the councils of Moulmein; the British frontier has advanced seven hundred miles since it was founded, from Martaban to the gates of China, and the last soldier has been withdrawn from its garrison.



WORSHIPPERS AT THE PAGODA

The town is built at the foot of a ridge of hills, in an arm of the Salwin river. The large island of Bilu-Gyun faces it on the west. At its northern end the Gyaing and the Attaran meet the Salwin, and by their presence add to the great beauty of its environment. The actual town of houses strung along its main switchback street, and for several miles along the shore, is scarcely delectable. It is an amalgam of foreign races, many of whom are devoid of the charm of the natural people of the soil. Not till



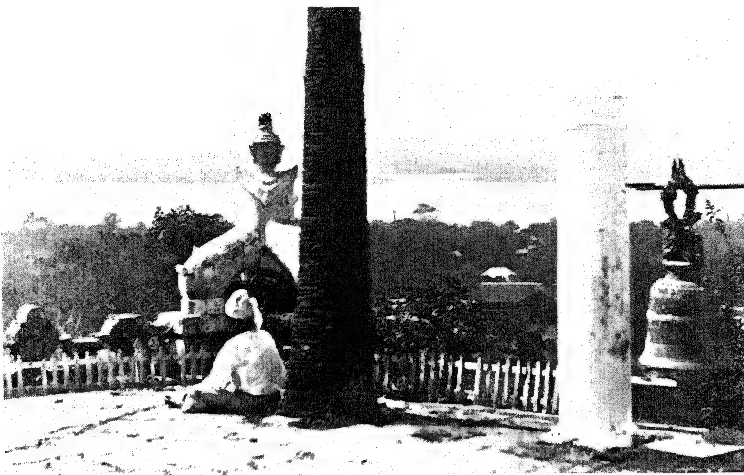
From a painting by Mrs. Otway Wheeler Cuffe.

MOULMEIN.



CARVED FIGURES AT THE PAGODA

one approaches the great stairs, which climb up the hillside to the pagodas and monasteries on its summit, is the sentiment of Burmese life revived.



THE SOUTH-WESTERN ANGLE OF THE PAGODA

On the pagoda-platform, where golden pinnacles flame in the sun, and light and shadow lie in bars upon the paved courts, one is liable of a morning to come upon such a spectacle as this. Under the lofty multiple roofs of a *tazoung* with golden pillars, a large company of the silken people is gathered for purposes of devotion. In the centre, under a glass dome, there is exposed for the edification of the pious a relic case of gold and jewels, offered by some ardent seeker after merit, as a gift to the Buddhist fraternity of Ceylon. Above it, in the shadowy recesses, sits a figure of the Buddha on a golden throne. Along the walls in its neighbourhood

the members of the Sacred Order are ranged in a double line, their faces passionless, or bent in prayer. Before the relic case, a group of aged men in white muslin, with the saintly faces that Burmans develop in old age, sit in an inner circle, their silvery hair and white fillets conspicuous in the midst of the crowd that fills the rest of the hall. What a crowd it is! First the men in white coats and silken tartans and head fillets, never worn before, and lustrous in their freshness, in colours of the dawn. Then behind them, filling the wide outer circles, women with coils of glossy black hair, lit with fresh flowers; soft silks and velvet thrown over their shoulders, pyramids of diamonds on their fingers, their small, bare feet turned up to the light behind.

A low, resonant voice the while repeats the holy text, and at intervals the whole company, with folded hands, and fluttering paper pennons, and bowed heads, joins in the audible devotion.

And outside, across the open court, the small boys race and laugh, and no one is worried by their laughter. The old are here to pray, and to ponder on the sadness, the transitoriness, and the illusion of life; the young to play and laugh in the sunlight. Of them (as indeed in all their other relations) these people are tolerant. For every one, it would seem, there is room. A few paces away, and under the very gleam of the pagoda, large cauldrons are set over a fire, and rice for the assembled company of the religious is being cooked. Overhead the bells tinkle and palm-leaves rustle in the wind. The pagoda is built upon the

summit of the hill, and the world that expands from it is of rare and great beauty. From where these people are seated at prayer, there is unfolded between each of the golden pillars and the carved eaves of the *tazoung* a picture of wide plains, yellow with the ripening harvest; of green villages under the shelter of great trees, of winding rivers and straight highways, of mountains flung in fantastic forms on the level spaces. From the town below a stream of worshippers flows up and down the steep, winding stairs; old men, who laugh at each other for getting blown; pretty women in silks of delicate hues; and flower-like children who climb, holding their sandals in their hands out of reverence for the sacred place.



THE LIMESTONE CAVES AT MOULMEIN

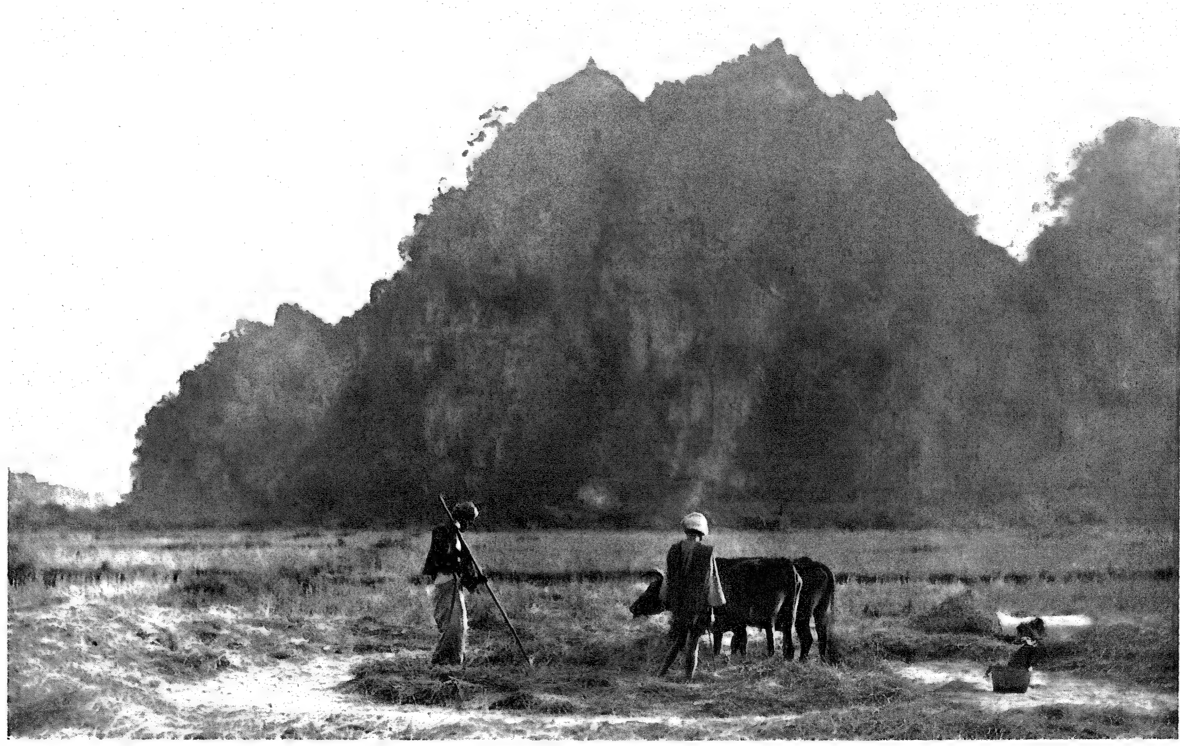
The view from Moulmein Hill is famous in Burma, and its praises are for ever on the lips of its people.

From the south-west angle of the southernmost pagoda, where a double sphinx looks out across the spaces, there is unfolded a picture of a wide river, making its last progress in loops and curves to the sea. Enthusiastic people say that it is as fine as the harbour



THE ROAD TO THE CAVES

of Sydney. At some distance from the river a long low line of hills runs down on the east, and another, the nucleus of Bilu-Gyun, runs along the west, a rampart for the retreating sun. The river enfolds in its course several large, low-lying islands, and at one point, at Mopun, it makes a beautiful curve ending in a headland, where rice and timber mills send their smoke into the



BOAZ

air, and ships at the harvest season wait for their cargoes to the distant world.

Looking more directly to the west, there is the river again in a straight bar of gold under the long town of Moulmein. More ships lie here, and they look to me as if they had dropped without explanation from the great world outside, into this land-locked anchorage under the swooning palms. For as I look, the conviction is borne in upon me of a drowsy land of extraordinary beauty; but not of a modern city; and the ships that lie here for a season seem to me to form no part of it.

Looking a little more towards the north, my eyes are greeted by the Zingyaik hills, whose loftiest peak, three thousand feet in height, dominates the whole panorama. Between these hills and Bilu-Gyun the right branch of the Salwin makes its way to sea. In times gone by—in the days of the Castle of Murmulan, when Portuguese artillerymen manned the guns of Martaban, and hungry adventurers from the West swept in their galleons up the gulf—and down even to more recent times, *this* was the main channel of the river. It is not the channel now. It has ceased for more than a generation to be navigable by steamers, and the time is approaching when it will cease to be navigable at all. Even now the aspect it wears is that of a low country slowly rising from the sea; a new world that is shaping into being. The claim of this western channel to be the main stream of the Salwin was, however, curiously established seventy-five years ago. The Salwin had been fixed upon as the boundary between British and

Burmese territory, after the war, and it became a question as to which branch of it was to be the boundary. The island of Bilu-Gyun, with an area of one hundred and seven square miles, was the stake at issue. The rival diplomatists resorted to the simple device of tying two cocoanuts together and sending them adrift on the main river. At Martaban, where the two branches divide, these cocoanuts for a moment remained stationary; then they were caught up by an eddy and swept to sea down the western channel, and Bilu-Gyun became British.

Turning away now from all that lies to the west, I see from my splendid vantage-point how this process of transition from water to land has been already accomplished. For here, where chequered rice-fields now turn up their patterns to the sky like some tesselated pavement; where monasteries now shelter under clusters of drooping palms, where villages and hamlets smile, and rivers, the Gyaing and the Attaran, wind across the landscape in ribbons of silver and blue, there once moved, if one may believe the testimony of the earth, the implacable sea. One feature of that bygone day still survives, a landmark of the past, as it is of the present. For the curious isolated hills, that rise up abruptly from the level plain, were once in reality islands, and the sea swept round them, and the blind waves roared in their caves.

Book VIII

THE SALWIN

En Voyage—Pha-an—The Caves of Pha-gat—To Shwegun—Shwegun—Primitive Travel—The Last Stage

CHAPTER XXXI

EN VOYAGE

NINE o'clock of a January morning, and I am abroad upon the great expanse of the Salwin. The river, of a grey-green colour, winds away through vast savannahs, flanked on the distant west by the Zingyaik range, and on the east by the Zway-kabyin peaks, and the far, faint outline of loftier mountains. As we progress, fresh hills rise up like the phantasms of a dream ; strange, shadowy, and tragic in form.

But the near banks are clothed with rare beauty, with waving grasses, and forests of wild cotton trees in bloom. At this season, they break into a splendour of cardinal blossom ; but are devoid of foliage. The rich tracery of their boughs is cut with the clarity of a cameo against the blue mountains and the momentary glory of the sunset.

We stop at little villages by the way, to pick up passengers ; and the village girls come down to the ship's edge, with trays of green papayas and red plums, bosom deep in the river ; and they laugh as they sink yet deeper in efforts to reach the passengers on board. Each of these, leaning forward over the rails, takes

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what he needs, and puts the price into a little cup in the middle of the tray.

Laung-gos sail swiftly by down-stream, their cordage taut, and their white sails full blown to the wind.



THE SALWIN

Anon a man rises up in a small canoe and shakes his silken *gaungbaung* to the air. The steamer whistles, the engines slacken down, and the single passenger is taken in. There is already assembled on board a strikingly interesting company; for besides the Burman travellers, there are the caravan Shan, with their pack-baskets ranged in line on the upper deck, and blazing turbans on their heads, and great hats delicate as Venetian lace within. There are groups also of Panthays in blue, and Yunnanese in satin caps; and at

to the singing. Nor is it customary in the East to scoff at the display of religion. And to the only Englishman on board, as he sits alone in the foreways of the ship, there is a subtle attraction in these voices singing some old familiar hymn, the first music of his youth.



KAW-GUN

As we approach Pha-an the limestone hills come nearer to the river. The Kaw-gun caves lie at the end of a narrow water on our left, and at Pha-gat, a little higher up, the width of the river contracts. Through these gateways there is entry into a dreamy world of wide, calm, waters, of wooded islands and distant peaks: and the splendid Titanic form of Zway-kabyin. Here we are very near the turning point of the range, and its form changes completely within a few hundred yards of ascent up the river.

CHAPTER XXXII

PHA-AN

AT Pha-an one may well come to a pause, for there are few more beautiful places in Burma than this small village, struggling to be a town, on a cliff-top above the Salwin. There is a house here for the European traveller, built on a promontory that juts like a great ram into the river; and every vista from it is one of beauty. Looking up, there is the wide splendour of the Salwin, a great island in its arms; and behind it is the ruddy peak of Pha-oo, whose shadow at dawn and evening lies mirrored in the stately water. On the western shore is the pyramid of Pha-boo, with a little white-and-gold pagoda on a hillock at its feet. The river runs by it under high banks, rich with grasses and plantain-groves, to the gateways of Pha-gat. Below the house on the east, and first lit by the day, is a sheltered harbour, in which the cargo dinghies lie, and the white masts of sailing vessels rise straight up from the water. Here, at all hours, there is life: bullock-carts wait to ship and unship their burden, while the red cattle browse under the trees; women and girls come down to laugh and bathe; Burmans squat on the sloping

bank, and smoke with philosophic calm; the lying Chittagonian sleeps and prays.

Turning away from here to the village, my eyes are drawn by the white, wide highway, past hayricks and plantain-groves and a monastery on a hill, to the lofty summit of Zway-kabyin and its one pagoda, perched like a lighthouse on its crest. At night, at this season, the hill Karen set fire to the jungle near its top, and then there is a wonderful circle of fire hung up against the starry sky, a thousand feet above the world. Zway-kabyin—"The Mooring of the Ship"—is the local Ararat; for it is said that when the whole world was covered with water, and the only survivors of the human race were in a ship afloat upon the deeps, they found a haven here at the summit of the great peak. And its majestic outline, its enormous form towering over the spaces at its feet, well fit it for the office that tradition, with poetic right, has assigned to it. "A stream that is clear as crystal, and cold in the hottest weather, gushes out



A VILLAGE MONASTERY ON THE SALWIN



WILD PLUMS AT PHA-AN

of a purple grot at its base. It has been the theatre of more agonising scenes than the muddiest and hottest stream in the provinces, scenes that have won for it the name of Teegaung—'The Brook of Weeping.' For it has not been only in time of deluge that Zway-kabyin has been chosen as a refuge." In the days of the conqueror, Alompra, a large number of Karen were



THE ROAD TO ZWAY-KABYIN

besieged here by the Siamese, and nearly all of them are believed to have perished for the want of food and water. Whence the place is known as Dongyang—"The Weeping City."

Once a year at the harvest season, when all the Burmese world goes on pilgrimage, the pagoda on the summit of the range is visited by all in its neighbourhood

who can essay the arduous climb. The view it offers is one of extraordinary variety and beauty, and it may fittingly be described in the words of the first white man who climbed up to it: "At the base of the western mountains the Salwin is seen plunging down its mighty waters to Martaban and Maulmain, where they are joined by the Gyaing, that bounds the prospect on the south and east, while little islands of forest trees, each concealing beneath its shade a quiet hamlet, dimple the whole plain, and babbling brooks thread their wandering ways like veins of silver, or mark the courses of their hidden waters by the emerald hue of their banks. On the inner side the spectator is astonished to find himself on the edge of a large basin, like the crater of an extinct volcano. Around, and beyond, on the opposite side of the gulf, for miles in extent, dark precipitous gaps, of every imaginable and unimaginable form, fling down their tall shadows a thousand feet about the place of entrance, enclosing an area of several square miles."

Pha-an itself is one of the chief centres of trade with the Shan States, and here, unexpectedly to the traveller fresh from the distant northern frontier of Bhamo, are reproduced within thirty miles of a seaport the picturesque elements of frontier life and trade—Panthay caravans and merchandise from China, traders and mulemen, and the thronging of many races. Of nights when the river is silent, one can hear from the high mud-cliffs the baying of the Panthay dogs, and the laughter of muleteers; and one can see in the darkness



A TAUNGTHU GIRL OF PHA-AN

the glow of their camp fires amongst the feathery plum-trees. Cattle, ponies, and silk, elephants and gold, are brought here for sale, and from here the fabrics of Manchester and Birmingham, brought so far by steam, start on their long journey over the highlands to the most distant markets of Shanland and Yunnan. The concourse of many strangers brings with it its customary penalty, and Pha-an, lifted above a world of extraordinary beauty, has long been known as the haunt of bad characters. Many of its people are Taungthus, now fast merging in appearance and dress into the Burmese type.



CHAPTER XXXIII

THE CAVES OF PHA-GAT

A BOLD promontory of rock with its crowning pagoda, reaching far over into the territories of the river, marks the western gateway of the Salwin at Pha-gat. I land here and make my way past monasteries, where scholars are at play, down a footpath sheltered by great trees, to the entrance of the cave. The stark face of the overhanging cliff is decorated with little images of the Buddha, fixed very close together in successive lines, which look like an inscription on the stone. The interior of the cave is dark and chaotic. Its floor, with beams flung across its pitfalls, suggests an abandoned mine. In the half-lit middle of the cave there is a rough ladder, which leads to a hidden chamber in the roof. The first part of the roof over the long entrance hall is clean and level, save where, in places, half-spherical domes have been carved out by the departed sea. In these shadowy places, and especially in the deep gloom of the cave's interior, the bats hang like soot. As we enter with flaming torches, myriads of them, disturbed, wheel in circles overhead, and the cave is filled with the humming of their wings. In

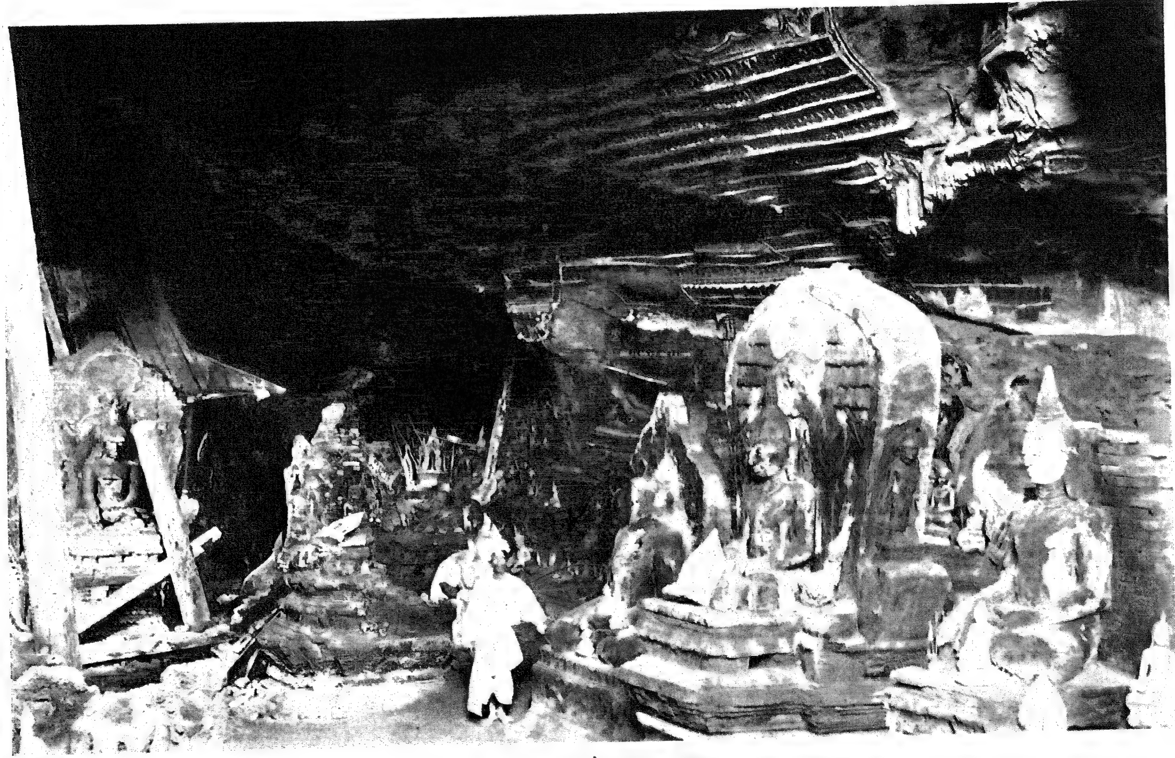


THE SALWIN FROM PHA-AN

of hemp, and rows of egg-plums. The bow-like vista of water ends here in monasteries and trees at the foot of the hill in which the cave lies hidden. I land and make my way through fields of purple beans, and ground creepers, past little huts under the drooping boughs of the wild plum, into the village. At its far end, the "street" tails off into a narrow avenue, which runs through the rice-fields right up to the entrance of the cave. The cliffs rise up abruptly from the last furrow, as they once did from the sea. At one point they bend outwards in a concave curve, and here, sheltered from rain and wind, the strange ornamentation of the cave begins. Masses of rock, running parallel to the cliff's face, make the outer wall of the first chamber; not strictly a cave, but a very singular and striking spectacle. Ten thousand images of the Buddha lie within the first sweep of the eye, from yellow-robed figures which line the footpath, to terra-cotta plaques fixed high on the jutting face of the cliff; from golden



AT THE CAVE'S MOUTH



THE CAVE'S INTERIOR

colossi, twice the height of Goliath, to miniature figures fit for a penwiper. A great stalagmite, rising up from the floor to near the brow of the overhanging cliff, is completely covered with small images of the Buddha enthroned, and its summit is crowned by a small pagoda.

Imposing as is this spectacle, it shrinks to insignificance when compared with the scene which opens on entering the cavern itself. In the words of a bygone



BUFFALOES

traveller: "It is of vast size, chiefly in one apartment, which needs no human art to render it sublime. The eye is confused, and the heart appalled. . . . Everywhere, on the floor, overhead, on the jutting points, and on the stalactite festoons of the roof, are crowded together images of Gautama—the offerings of successive ages. Some are perfectly gilded; others encrusted with calcareous matter; some fallen, yet sound; others mouldered; others just erected. Some of these are of stupendous size; some not larger than one's finger; and

some of all the intermediate sizes—marble, stone, wood, brick, and clay. Some, even of marble, are so timeworn, though sheltered from change of temperature, that the face and fingers are obliterated. Here and there are models of temples, *kyoungs*, etc., some not larger than half a bushel, and some ten or fifteen feet square, absolutely filled with small idols, heaped promiscuously one on the other. As we followed the path, which wound among the groups of figures and models, every new aspect of the cave presented new multitudes of images. A ship of five hundred tons could not carry away the half of them."

Here, in fact, are the accumulations of ages; and the interest of this strange spectacle, to the student of Buddhism, lies in the key it offers to the history of the religion in Burma, of its origins, and the way by which it came to the country.

The long day of my visit to the caves nears its close, and in the quiet shelter of the evening I make my way back to Pha-an. Yet one more sensation remains to complete the *bizarre* suggestions of the day. For as I near the gateways of Pha-gat, I am startled by the sound of a great flight of birds, a sound as of grey geese on the wing, but of such volume as can proceed only from a great host. These are the bats of the Pha-gat cave. For more than twenty minutes they sweep out, in a long swift line that grows tortuous as it recedes; and, as far as I can see into the ruddy twilight, the line extends. Swiftly as each creature in it is flying, it looks in the distance like a smoke spiral



From a painting by J. R. Middleton.

THE BEGGING RECLUSE.

p. 618.

waiting for a wind to blow it away. They go every evening, say my boatmen, to drink the salt water of the sea; and they cross in their flight the crests of the Zingyaik hills.

We move slowly on along the dead water, the half-moon overhead. White mists gather on the shadowy face on the river, and the air grows chill.



CHAPTER XXXIV

TO SHWEGUN

FROM a faint shark streak, glinting white on the river's horizon, to a puffing monster of fire and iron; from faint paddle-throbs, like the humming of distant bees on a summer's day, to a loud roar and shriek; the steamer comes to take all the travelling world of Pha-an on its way. It is in great solitudes that the poetry of swift motion makes its finest appeal. Englishman, Shan, Panthay, Indian, Taungthu, and Karen—all who are waiting here—embark; and we are borne away on this new, throbbing carpet of Solomon, in a manner that delights us all. Past the shadow of Pha-boo, we enter the left channel of the river, skirting an island in our course, and Pha-nwé is soon lost to sight behind us. The route we are following is in a sense historic, since the names of all these peaks and precipices are associated with the bygone tribulation of the Karen race. The story of their own struggles is told under the guise of a legend of the frog (*pha*).

The place of Pha-nwé is taken, as we advance, by new masses of rock on our left, each duplicated in the

hills rise up in its place, changing in form with every moment of our advance, as Gibraltar does before the



THE CALM OF THE SALWIN

eyes of the ocean traveller; and in the blinding sunlight all detail of delicate tracery is lost in the one supreme beauty of form.

After this we take a quiet way, with something of a sense of physical rest, with somewhat of desire to prepare for the next great spectacle, until we come, as the evening falls, to the last splendid passage between Pha-an and Shwegun. Dark blue hills curve up to right and left on the western shore, like the claws of a crab, holding between them a mountain of palest blue, that towers up to a high pyramidal peak. Every detail of this mountain picture is reproduced with fidelity in the motionless calm of the river. Timber-craft lie under the near banks, and piles of rescued logs, and

CHAPTER XXXV

SHWEGUN

A GLIMPSE OF VILLAGE LIFE

SHWEGUN is the end of civilisation on the Salwin. From here the steamers turn back to Moulmein, and he who would travel farther must embark in the slow-moving boats of the country, and face the primitive life. It is a place in which to wait a day, before taking the final plunge.

There is a house here for the traveller, built by the river bank, and the village street, which is also the highway, runs past it. Life therefore is ever afoot under the windows of the house.

Here is the Myo-ôk of Hlaingbwé, on his way back from the burning of a monk at U-daung. The Myo-ôk is the greatest man in Shwegun. He is an officer of the empire, a link in that chain of office which begins with the village headman and culminates in the august person of the Viceroy. And here in all the wide Hlaingbwé tract he is the personal embodiment of British rule. No Viceroy has ever come to Hlaingbwé; no Lieutenant-Governor; no Chief Justice; no Com-

mander-in-Chief. The district magistrate, who is greater than the Myo-ôk, seldom, if ever, comes. All these are white men. The Myo-ôk is of the soil, and upon



THE SALWIN

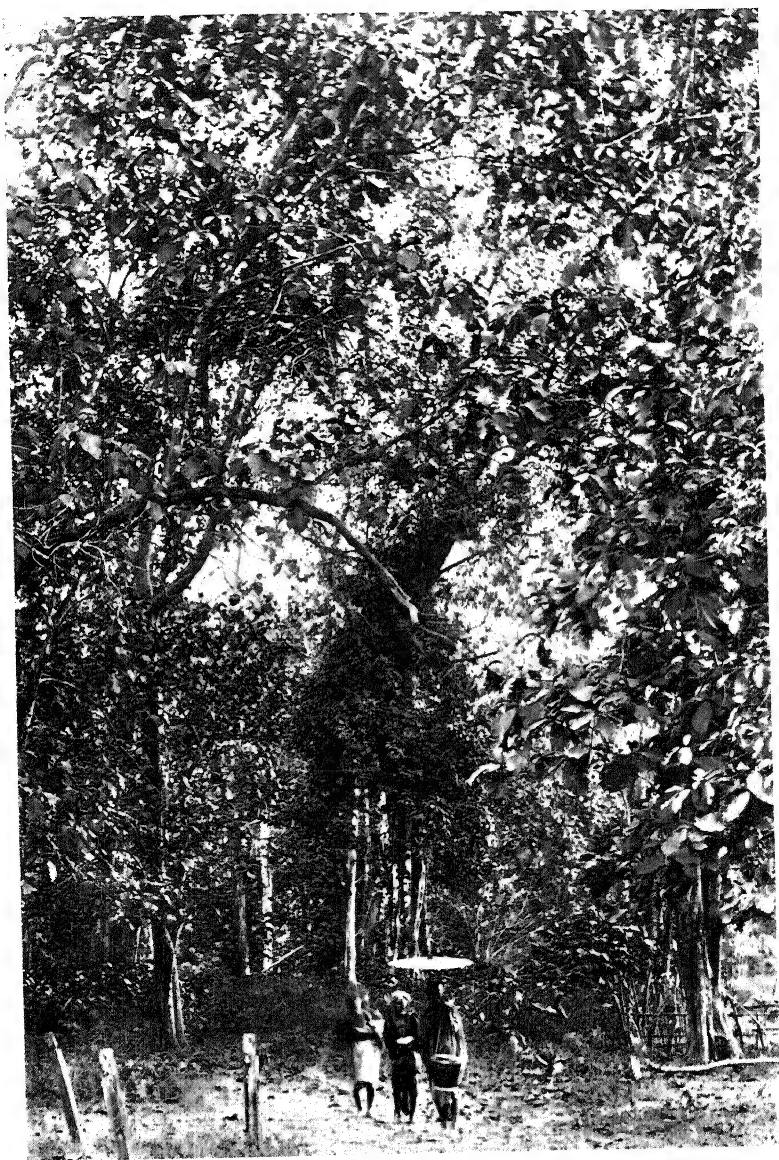
him here the burden of empire falls. It is he who comes into nearest personal contact with the people. There are men who are born, and live, and die in Hlaingbwé, who know no other representative of British rule. As to the man, you see that he has self-respect, dignity, not to say *hauteur*; his silken skirt is a thing of texture and beauty; his muslin coat is fine and immaculately white. An attendant follows him, holding a long umbrella over his head; another carries his silver betel-box. An ironical spectacle, if you will; for the man is unconscious of the glory for which he stands;

he is in his own country, and yet in a measure an alien; a judge, but of doubtful honour; a pro-consul in his way, but a son of the jungle in his innermost heart.

After him, slowly pacing through the forest, comes a man of both worlds, a *pothoodaw*. His nondescript garments are neither lay nor clerical; from their colour one might fancy them to be the cast-off garments of a monk, worn with usage, and soiled by the wayside dust. The pole he carries over his shoulders, with a basket slung at each end, is unmistakably lay; the yellow parasol, with the sunlight pouring through it on his shaven head, is of clerical suggestion. His carriage is grave and reverend; his manner is that of a saint; and his two companions address him in words suitable to these pretensions. He is in reality a simple-hearted and devout old man, upon whom the conviction of holiness has grown; he spends his life in pious works, and has put the world behind him; but he is not a monk. His companions are a pair of old and wrinkled Shan, with faces graven like the face of a sailor—originals both. One of them carries an English pipe, which he



THE "POTHOODAW" AND HIS CRONIES



PACING THROUGH THE FOREST

smokes with stoic calm, his fingers closing over the bowl with the gentle solicitous grip of the smoker. Experience of many things is written large upon the faces of this couple; shrewd humour, the indefinable air of worldly wisdom; and over all there is a layer of recent respectability, in keeping with their new character as the companions of a saintly man.

Soon after they pass there comes, with a great creaking and droning of wheels through the chambered forest, a long line of carts, bearing back from the scene of piety the members of the Sacred Order. They recline, like true priests, on the soft hay spread for them within; they look about them with the innocent curiosity of their race and character. Here and there amongst them is one with the gentle face of an ascetic, of a philosopher trained in the sadness of life and deeply convinced of its illusion. One such lies back, an old man, weary with the wayfaring, his life's history easy to read upon his saintly face.



FILLING THE WATERPOTS

Across the road, Burmese policemen, shorn of all the picturesqueness of their race, amble about in *khaki* garments, and forage caps set with an imitation of jauntiness on their shaven heads. The British effort to

convert a nation of artistic philosophers into disciplined policemen is a comedy of fine flavour. In the village the people crowd at their doors and under the swaying palms, to see the procession go by; the clerkly post-master beside his letter-box, scarlet with the imperial cypher blazoned upon it; the Chinaman before his liquor shop, also an imperial care; the girl fresh from her silk-loom; the old man, too old now to totter more than a few feet from his door.

Past the house in an opposite direction, there runs a pathway to the river's edge. Down this way, as the afternoon wanes, the people pass to bathe. Madame comes along in a dark green skirt and breast cloth; only a single garment, wrapped about her, and tucked in with a simple twist over her bosom. Her feet and ankles and her soft shoulders are free to the air; and as she comes swaying along, with the peculiar gait of the Burmese woman, half waddle, half swagger, wholly different from the statuesque pose of the nearer East, she looks comely and attractive enough. Holding one hand, and tripping beside her, two steps to her one, is her little daughter, a pretty laughing child with the voice of a happy tom-tit. The sun, as they reach the pebbled edge of the river, is nearing the horizon, and the whole width of water is turned to red-gold, freighted with the shadows of distant trees. The child slips her small garment swiftly to her feet, and tumbles into the water. Her mother and her grown-up sisters are obliged to proceed with more discretion; but a woman is old indeed, who does not presently behave like a child in

the water. Here, in her native element, the most affected belle—though affectation is far from these people—speedily forgets herself. She splashes about, and flops suddenly into the water, which fills the only garment like a balloon; and by dint of this she contrives to swim a yard or two. The air exhausted, and Madame



EVENTIDE

being nearly out of her depth, she rises again to her feet with laughter, shakes the fresh water from her face, and renews the joy. Then she reaches out an arm for her spare garment, lets it fall over her dark Japanese head and soft shoulders, rises, and in a trice is into it, and out of the old one; all *coram populo*, but

achieved with infinite grace and discretion. After which, there is some washing to be done, and then mother and daughter return home.

All the women of the village are at this hour by the river's edge; some with babies barely able to walk, but receiving early initiation into the joys of the beautiful river that flows by their homes. There is a curious contrast to be found between the face of the unhappy urchin, enduring the gaunt ministrations of a nurse, familiar to every purchaser of a certain English soap, and that of a little Burmese child, taking its first lessons by the river's side. It is in the river, where he plays and splashes for hours every day of his youth, that the Burman learns his gaiety of heart, and develops the fine muscles of his race.



CHAPTER XXXVI

PRIMITIVE TRAVEL

THE grey dawn calls us, sleepers on the pebbled shore; and we wake one by one, each man after his own habit. We have been sleeping under the stars for the sake of the cool air and an early start. A pot of rice is put on the fire; the polers get ready for the long day's work. The sun, is not yet risen as we get under weigh, the boat gliding forward under the banks. It is a grey day, heavy with clouds, and the sun, when he comes, shines only at intervals, sending down broad ribs of light in a manner that makes the firmament overhead seem like a richly striped dome. Seldom is this effect of sunlight so complete as it is to-day.

Very quickly the fascination of primitive travel steals over my spirit, and all that spoke at the outset of discomfort is forgotten. The broad river lies about us, and laps our bows; at once a familiar friend and a stately companion. Its wide expanses reach away to the horizon, and its cool green stream runs laughing through the fingers of one who leans over the boat's edge. The water is as clear and limpid as that of a

mountain rivulet, and as the boat glides on over its shallows, the rocks and pebbles of its bed lie discovered to the eye. Splendid giants of the forest marshal both its banks; creepers, purple and azure, hang in masses from the boughs. Plantain-groves and sloping fields of beans and broad tobacco tell of man, the newcomer, his small and scattered beginnings. Wild and majestic as is the river here, after a course of more than a thousand miles from its infancy in unknown lands, its near banks, along which we steer, are graced with many of the minor charms of an English river—grasses and ferns, and drooping willows, and cool shady places under trees.



PRIMITIVE TRAVEL

The poling keeps us well in touch with these, and the rough bark of the willow-trees is scarred and pitted with the prints of the passing pole-heads. Year by year, the boats go up in a long procession, and each boat as it passes leaves its trace.

The art of the poler is itself a thing of fascination. The men, of whom there two, run down the centre of the boat along a single plank, and the poles of fifteen feet, with pointed iron heads, glide through the fingers with a "slick" grace, till they ring on a rock under the water. Then they bend and quiver, like reeds in the wind, as the polers bear upon them, and the boat leaps forward. At times they run out to the last rung, and find no bottom; the boat swings nearer to the bank, and they shoot out to a tree-trunk, find a lodgment there, and the polers strain at their butts. As the boat moves,

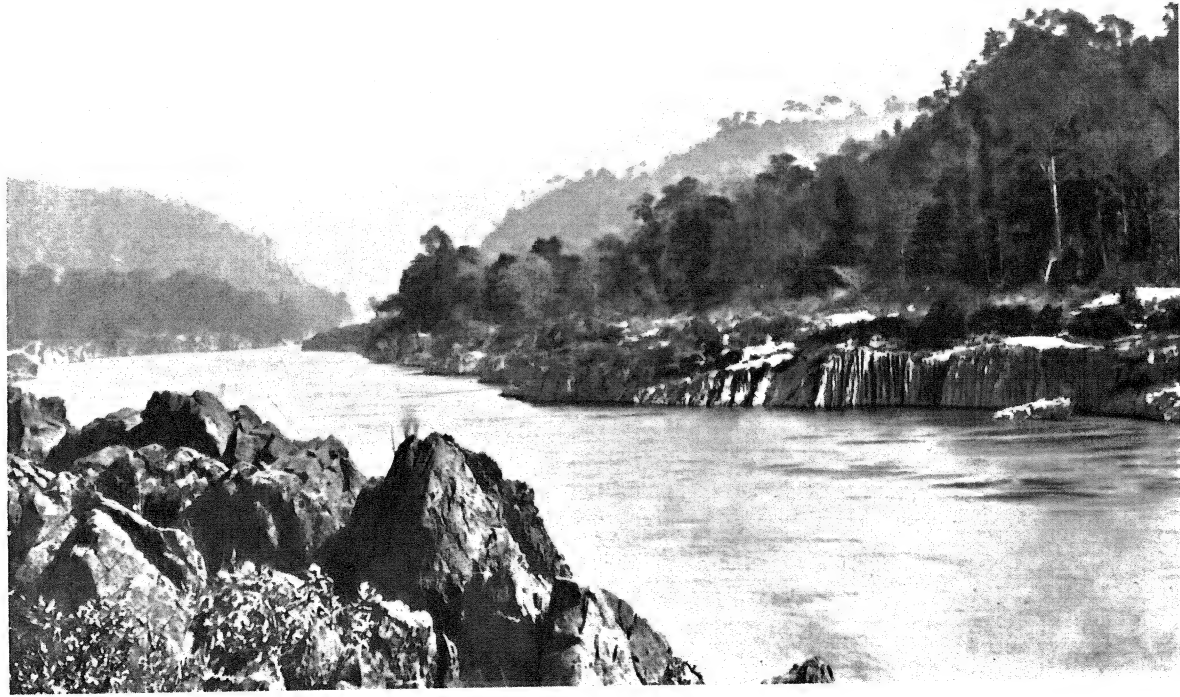


THE POLER

the poles fall with a splash into the water, and so *da capo*.

The process fills many an hour of travel with its fascination. For there is judgment in the selection of each vantage-point, swift dexterity in the slipping of the pole, fine balancing, precision; and as the day grows, proof of the arduous training which enables these slight men—they are Muslim Chittagonians—to labour up the river for twelve hours every day.

The chief feature of the river between Shwegun and Kawkarit is the big island of Kawlon. Up the western arm, just above Shwegun, there spreads a vista of blue water and rich grasses ending in a peak three thousand feet in height. As we turn up the eastern branch, this is lost to sight, and we steer a peaceful way under overhanging willows and the shelter of forest-clad banks. Again and again the river is bisected by numerous islands in its course, and the way we follow narrows, gaining in homely beauty. Anon it widens out, and so till we enter once more the full river. At Kamamau, white rocks rise up in the river's bed and along its banks, narrowing and dividing its course; the murmur of rushing water fills our ears; where the river is narrowest, cables of twisted cane are strung across it to catch the derelict timber of distant forests; the huts of the salvors lie amphibious under the banks, and the logs gather in thousands in the bays and curves of the river. Up-stream a wooded island is mirrored in its calm; blue mountains rise up beyond, and in the east, gigantic cliffs and precipices of shadowy



DEFILES OF THE SALWIN

limestone. As the sun nears the horizon, we turn into the mouth of the Yunzalin, and anchor for the night under the hamlet of Kawkarit.

And here it may be noted that the personality of the Salwin is wholly distinct from that of the Irrawaddy and the Chindwin. Its distinguishing features are its fantastic and tremendous limestone hills; its rapids and rocky islands so near the sea; its mystic and half-tragic character; and throughout all, its undertone of homely beauty.

Although at Kawkarit it is only some seventy miles distant from the sea, although for seventy years it has been under the influence of British civilisation, it retains even here its character of a remote and savage river, flowing through but half-known lands. Its people are mainly Karen, shy, sullen, and difficult of access. The stillness of its forests is unbroken by the hum of the telegraph wire, and no engine has ever throbbed above Shwegun. There is only a weekly post, which achieves with difficulty twenty miles a day, and it takes longer to cover the short distance from Shwegun to Pha-pun, the headquarters of the district, than it does to travel from Edinburgh to Moscow. Yet in this very isolation there resides its particular charm; for it takes the traveller into great solitudes, along almost silent highways, into a land of primitive people; and the means of travel are such as men were used to, when the world was young.

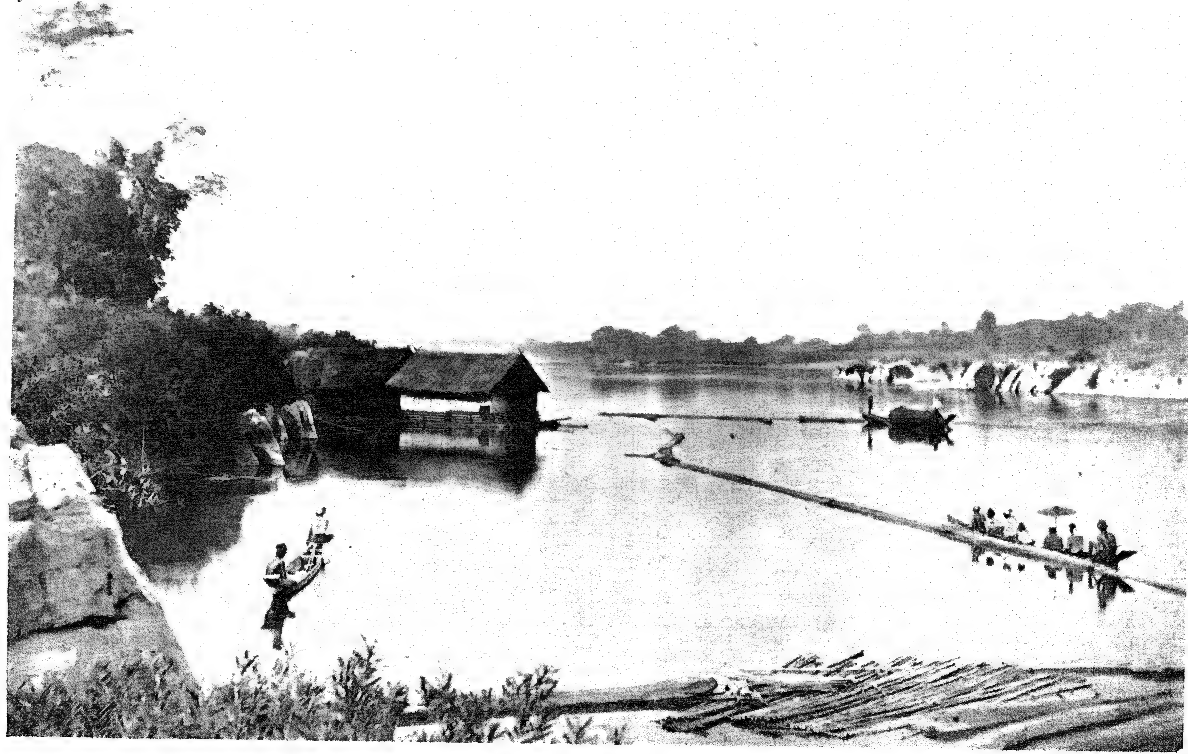
CHAPTER XXXVII

THE LAST STAGE

EARLY dawn again finds us moving on the face of the waters. Grey mists brood over them, and wisps of cloud lie low in the valleys and athwart the hills. The faint sunlight of the morning adds to the ghostly character of the scene. Tremendous precipices tower up against the sky. A great stillness broods over all. The unreality of things lies insistent on the spirit.

The channel of the main river is broken up by great masses of white rock, half-hidden under willows. The current runs swiftly under the east bank, which is deeply and sumptuously wooded. Looking down from an eminence on to the river, I obtain a full impression of its savage and desolate character. But all along the banks, and under the lee of the white rocks, there are places of miniature and exquisite beauty; mirror-like pools and sheltered inlets, where the clear water glints green

At Kamaulé there is a village, and the river is crossed by successive cables of twisted cane to hold the derelict logs. Each cable is the property of a



AT KAMAULÉ

separate owner, who takes his own timber, and lets the rest go on. The cables are fastened to the high rocks on either bank, and they stretch across the river, like Himalayan rope bridges, except that they lie for the most part *on* the water. The trunks of gigantic trees fastened to them increase the weight of their resistance, and they make a boom across the river which looks as if it meant to bar all progress. But there are intervals of bare cane, and it is like working through a Chinese puzzle to find one's way through them all. As the boat slips over, the cane yields under the water, and rubs along the keel with the sound of stage thunder. A ferry canoe plies across the river, and at the far end, beyond the last cable, the house-raft of the forest ranger lies at anchor. Here for many months of the year this Englishman lives in solitude. The raft lies in a sheltered cove, protected by an array of rocky pinnacles against the driving flood. The jungle, all but impenetrable, rises behind him, and every movement of the river conveys its message to his floating home. It looks like a neat little Japanese house, with its thatched eaves and its hanging orchids, and it is built on mammoth logs of teak that bear the marks of a dozen owners. Seventy feet of limpid water lie below, and one can see it when one is there between the great logs of the floor, and the sunlight quivering in its deeps. The view as I turn my face away to the south is of white scarred rocks, motionless timber, and water that seems asleep. Up-stream there are near mountains, lofty and precipitous, under whose pedestals



THE MYSTIC SALWIN

the river curves in ample spaces, in which the whole world of sky and mountain is mirrored.

A few miles more and my limit is reached. At Yinbaung the mountains close in on every hand; shadowy and fantastic masses deploy behind each other; the river is in the grip of its iron keepers. Yet its power is unabated, and traces of its scorn and fury are legible in the shattered rocks that have come into nearest contact with it. Scarcely a vestige of their own individuality survives; in everything they betray their subjection to its caprice. Worn into the most fantastic forms, hollowed out into caverns, sliced like sawn timber, pitted like the target of a battery of guns, cut into pinnacles like ant-hills, they are graven with

the image of water in its rise and fall and infinite succession of waves.

The face of the river itself is at this season calm and untroubled. One might take it, at a glance, for some land-locked water without exit or entrance. But a nearer look reveals a world of subdued life and passion, of which symptoms may be traced on its calm. Some of these are but faint dimples, delicate as any on a woman's face; others are as rich in their involute beauty as the rose windows of a cathedral; others, again, are like wayward strings of pearls moving under a secret influence; and some are like open-mouthed trumpets whirling round at incredible speed. They are very



THE HOME OF THE FOREST RANGER

wonderful to look at, and they tell the whole tale, if one could read it, of the river's life. Each whirl and dimple has its immediate cause, in some hollow worn with years of strife, some sharp dagger of rock, some crag or boulder far out of sight. For the river here is of great depth and velocity. But for its depth, it would be hard to believe, as one stands and looks down on it from the rocky heights, that it has come already a journey of fifteen hundred miles or more. And its first discoverer, as he found his way up its clear green waters, past rocky islands and narrowing ways, into the heart of the grim defiles and turbulent mountains that encompass it here, might well have believed that he had come to within a measurable distance of its source.

We turn back in the late evening, with slow and measured oars, and I sit, where it is my custom, at the boat's prow, the clear impenetrable water a yard below. It is a narrow seat impending over great deeps and implacable whirlpools; and there is nothing beyond it but the wonderful landscape of blue mountains and quiet waters; for all the rest of my world on the boat is behind and out of sight. The moon rises, a yellow orb patterned with her dead lands and sea against the lavender of the sky. Her light makes a silver pathway down the long river; shadows of cliffs and crags lie motionless upon the surface; and as we sweep down by grace of the current, the men rest on their oars, and all is still, save the faint cheeping of crickets from the woods. One draws nearer, by some



ABOVE YIN BAUNG

secret affinity, at this late hour, to the tremulous heart of Nature.

The lights of Kamaulé and the rafts by the river twinkle out as we draw near, and in a little while the day's toil is over, and we are at rest for the night.

The solitary white occupant of the house-raft is glad of company, and, dinner over, we sit out on the little bamboo shelves under the sloping eaves of the house, talking in low tones; while the moonlight streams over the still face of the river, the timber cables, the white rocks mirrored in it, and the mighty jungle about us. As we move to turn in for what remains of the night, the little house sways over the great logs that support it, upheld by seventy feet of living water. And when in the night I wake, to sleep again, I hear the murmur of the river flowing by.

These raft-houses are renewed each year, and the timber on which they are built is sent on its way at the beginning of the flood season. The cables across the river are twisted and strung at the beginning of the cold weather, when the rush of water is abated; and they are swept away by the first floods in the rains when the felled logs, that have lain insensate all the winter, come roaring down the river. Last season a great flood came, and for two days they swept down in furious procession, jamming, creaking, and dashing to pieces against the cliffs; filling the small canoes with fear; and forbidding any man to cross from one shore to the other.

As the floods recede many a derelict log is left high

and dry on the worn summit of some cliff or island, or in the fork of a tree; and there it remains—it may be for years—till some new flood, big enough to answer its call, heeds it lying there, and sweeps it on to its destiny. Thus a man may die and his heirs inherit his wealth, and some of it may still remain, unrealised, into the days of his son's sons, or even for ever.

But this is of the Romance of the Timber-Cutter. There is no lonelier life for a white man than that of the forest assistant, whose duty it is to see that the timber is cut in accordance with the State regulations, and sent upon its way to the seaport towns. The pictures given in the first chapter of this book illustrate better than many words the history of a log from the time it is cut to the time it reaches its destination. They were taken by an officer of the Bombay-Burma Company—that famous company to which the fall of the kings of Burma is attributed.

Book IX

THE YUNZALIN

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE YUNZALIN

AT Kawkarit the whole character of my journey suddenly changes. From a great and deep river, I pass into a shallow-hearted forest stream; the frowning crags and mystic battlements of the Salwin have no fellowship with the narrower Yunzalin; and the sense of space gradually passes away. A new world of travel opens out before me, for here I have the jungle very near me, resonant with the music of many birds; swift waters racing over stony rapids; and a sultry air. The polesmen run up and down, and are hard put to it at places, where the rapids tax their utmost skill.

At one of these, as we pass on, a bamboo raft is wrecked and jammed, fragments of it aimlessly floating away, while its two occupants labour to release what survives from the clutches of the rocks. Teak logs float past, and where the press of timber obstructs the passage of the Yunzalin, elephants toil to relieve its congestion. Again and again I come upon the felled timber lying high and dry, wedged in among the rocks, or shattered into touchwood.

As the shadows lengthen, a cool air blows upon the river, the forest is pierced by long shafts of light, peacocks sun their plumage on the sands, wildfowl come out to feed, and monkeys run along the shores. Still later the crickets cheep, and the shrill call of the peacock is supplanted by the raucous barking of deer.



TIMBER AGROUND IN THE YUNZALIN

The stars shine out, first one by one, and then in a great company; musk odours fill the air.

There are no hamlets now in sight, for I have come into the very heart of the jungle. Its fascination is immense, but incommunicable. There is the cry of the peacock! If you have heard it only in an English park, how shall you judge of its attraction



From a painting by J. R. Middleton.

FLOWER STALLS ON THE PLATFORM OF THE PAGODA.

in the still truculent jungle? How it wails through the forest spaces! The very cry and embodiment of solitude.

An hour before the dawn, my eyes open in obedience to some primitive instinct, and I find it good to lie abed and watch the jungle. Bamboos rise up in graceful forms, their stems making a pattern against the dense foliage. They are eloquent to me of the realism of the Japanese artist. Overhead, above the crowding masses, the new growth shoots out for light and air. A wind comes by, filling the jungle with life; from a tall tree on the edge of the clearing, dying leaves loose their hold of life, and flutter noiselessly to earth. Ripe fruit falls with a soft thud on the mould. There is a strange stillness in this world that is teeming with life.

Faint washes of colour sweep at last over the face of the sky; slowly the dawn comes, and the jungle wakes. The wail of the peacock echoes through its solitudes, the wild cock crows, and monkeys begin to chatter in the dusk trees. The sleeping polers awake and rout the live embers from the night's ashes. There is a simmering of rice in the pot. Down in a long trough of the forest lies the Yunzalin—beautiful, inscrutable, a mystery asleep. I leave the rest-house in its clearing in the jungle—a curious exotic. There is furniture within it, of the kind necessary to Western life. The house itself lies open and unprotected. I enter it in the still darkness, and leave it in the grey dawn. There is no caretaker.

Soon we are all on board, and the long day's poling begins. For an hour or more there is the engrossing pageant of the morning; then the river claims attention, for it is broken up and thwarted by sandy willow-hidden islands, round which the waters race with extreme velocity. The polers are put to their utmost exertion. For many consecutive moments, the boat remains motionless, in equilibrium between human muscle and the river's purpose. The polers can no longer work in couples for fear of losing, in the brief interval between their pole thrusts, the hard-won ground. Each man takes up the tale where the other leaves it, shouting: "*Bismilla*, in the name of God." Thus is the passage won, and we climb into slacker water.

" Lal-la-lal-la-lal-la, there-is-but-one-God-and-Mahomet-is-the-prophet-of-God, lal-la-lal-la-lah."

Such is the prelude to each rapid.

The waters swish and murmur about us; the drooping willows lave their tresses in the stream; under its sunlit surface the pebbles glisten like marble of many colours. Purple hornbills wing their resonant flight from tree-summit to tree-summit, across the river's width; kingfishers, with sapphire and turquoise wings, dart over the shallows; king-crows sail overhead, and grey egrets, like some slippered pantaloon, cross the boat's track.

The peacocks love best at this hour, and at evening, the sandy spaces, where willows silver in the wind, and the near jungle provides a rapid and sure retreat.



MORNING ON THE YUNZALIN

When stalked and convinced of pursuit, they emit a quick note of warning to all the denizens of the jungle. Monkeys look up from their clutched fruit; the lusty crowing of cocks dwindles to a short responsive cluck; tigers pause in their lordly progress to wonder, with such curiosity as befits a sovereign, what is astir.



NOON

There is a flash of something at play in the water, and even as I look, it is transformed into an otter, making swiftly for the shelter of the bank. He is shot as he leaps across an open bit of sand, squeals and tumbles over, rises, and makes for the willows only to die at the river's lip. From the sunlit surface of the water, curious heads emerge, to look swiftly about

them, and then to disappear, only to come up again for the sake of knowing what is afoot.

Follows the weary blazing noon, from which all seek shelter but the polers toiling inch by inch up the river. Here and there a canoe darts past us, the single poler bending to his work with classic grace; girls with fair, smooth limbs and great piles upon their backs regard us open-eyed with wonder; a field of tobacco on the sandy shore confirms the human note. And so once more, the sunset, and the dark.

All through the night it is cold, and towards dawn so cold that sleep becomes impossible. We all go shivering down to the boat at six o'clock, just as the sun is coming up over the tree-tops, a pale orb hung in the mist. The river is shrouded in a dense fog, and the spectacle, as his faint rays shoot out in widening ribbons through its motionless curtains, is ghostly and unreal. But an hour later all trace of this is gone, and the sunlight laughs on the water, and in the glades and aisles of the forest.

Four boats with sweeping oars come swiftly upon us, in the last of them a fellow white man, dignity upon his face and in the pose of his body. We measure at a glance; a second, and we shall pass each other for ever. We raise our hats and pass on, and somewhere in the jungle there is an echo of two belated "Good-mornings." But brisk dialogues have been exchanged between the crews, and a letter that has been waiting for some such chance has been sent on the first stage of its long journey home.



EVENING ON THE YUNZALIN

As the day wears on, incident after incident contributes to the general character of the world through which I am travelling. Monkeys swim in long files across the river; a snake writhes up the steep bank, only to be caught in the unpitying talons of a hawk; and a small red deer, picking his leisurely way amongst the dead trees of the foreshore, darts instantly to cover on seeing us approach.

After hard straining at a rapid, we enter long passages of calm river, winding through forest avenues of the most stately character. Sheer walls of forest, two hundred feet in height, shut us in. Creepers hang over the water from lofty boughs; masses of silver leaves adorn the trees like flowers; palms that would grace the garden of a palace grow here in waste profusion. What a picture it is at once of crowded life and individual beauty!

Men glide down on bamboo rafts, strung lightly together for the short journey; pole in hand, muscles that quiver in the sun, a bag of meal at their feet. In a flash my mind is carried back three thousand years by the Hellenic grace and simplicity of it all.

The white moon-like bloom of the wild gourd; the secret gleam of water on the tree-trunks; the flight of starlings across blue bays and estuaries of sky; the rustle of wildfowl in the jungle; the insistent *cule-cule* of water, where, passing swiftly over a hidden stone, it breaks against itself in music; in the clear dawn, peaks that show beyond the near hills of the river, cutting the blue heaven into Alps; wild-eyed buffaloes,

only a little less savage than the true denizens of the jungle; white egrets, that make a living on their backs as privileged allies; red and olive tints on the water, where sunlit shallows join hands with shady deeps; fallen giants of the forest, stark wrecks in the pitiless noon blocking half the river where they lie; here and there at long intervals faint human beginnings; girdled trees withering under the hand of man; a hut; a pathway marked with footprints in the jungle; the spoor of a Karen elephant; small fields of tobacco on the river's edge—of such is the day's journey.

The river becomes more arduous as we advance, and at places it is sheer ascent. Rapids grow more numerous, and at some of the swiftest it needs all our united efforts to surmount them. Gun-bearer and cook, valet and clerk, plunge breast high into the river with a rope, and the polers find in me a mate.

After these strenuous passages come long intervals of deep, calm water. Blue hills appear in the river vistas, and patches of *taung-gya* cultivation—the reckless surface tillage of the wild man—lie bare in the sun upon their slopes.

At Mintabyi there is a considerable Shan village immersed in trade. In the shops by the wayside, there are French sardines in oil, Dutch milk in tins, aërated lemonade, dried fish and groceries, Karen fabrics, red and white striped cloths, and embroidered coats. Most of the houses have gardens of pineapples and palms. As I enter the village from the river, a dove-catcher goes forth, with a decoy-bird and nooses on a string.



A PINEAPPLE ORCHARD AT MINTABYI

THE BIVOUAC

Darkness overtakes us, far from any habitation, and we anchor for the night under a nameless shore. A sand-bank that is clean and soft offers us its hospitality. Soon there is a great fire ablaze, and a hut in con-



RIVER TRAVEL ON THE SALWIN

struction. Dinner over, we sit round the fire and smoke, wrapped in blankets, for the night is cold. The sky overhead is a cloudless violet, lit with the great northern stars which still, happily, bear me company. In an hour the moon comes up over the tree-tops and over the hills that part the Salwin from the Yunzalin.

The shadowy jungle grows visible, one tree from another; the light falls in rippling bars across the river. From the forest across the water there peals the shrill sex-call of a tigress seeking her mate.

For a little while longer we smoke on under the spell of the night and the bivouac. Then, one by one, the company turns in under shelter, voices die down; the gurgle of *huquahs* ceases; the embers of the untended fire pale amidst the ashes. The moon has not climbed three spears' lengths of her way across the heavens, when one and all of us lie in the deep sleep that comes after a long day of toil.

As we near Pha-pun, the valley of the river widens and yields more room for cultivation. Wild cotton-trees reappear in great luxuriance, their rose-scarlet tracery of bloom cut into the blue sky, their branches peopled with monkeys and starlings; and where they rise up from the river's edge, whole navies of red blossom sweep along the surface of the water. Towards sunset the colours become exquisitely soft and tender, and the wild primeval character of the jungle is no longer manifest.

PHA-PUN

Pha-pun is a little island of shadowy civilisation, amidst the wilds of the Salwin and the Yunzalin. It is the capital of the district, and the only settlement within its limits that can under any pretence be described as a town. Its claim to notice lies in this, that it stands here an embodied symbol of the British power.



PHA-PUN: THE WILD COTTON-TREE IN BLOOM

At Pha-pun there resides the administrator of the vast territory known as the Salwin Hill Tracts. Here, there is a court-house for the dispensation of justice—a building that is half jail, half fortress, built within a stockade on the hill—a hospital for the sick, and house accommodation for a forest officer, an engineer, a doctor, and a policeman. The settlement can lay claim besides to a few short roads, lined with avenues of planted trees, sure sign that it has been in British hands some years; a few shops kept mainly by Chittagonians, in which Western luxuries are sold at prices that would sound extravagant to any one who had not been poled up the long journey from Moulmein; a wooden mosque for the use of the lying but pious Chittagonian; and a public ground that resounds of mornings to the tread of Shan and Karen yokels learning their drill and the English voice of command of the Afridi instructor, and of evenings to the laughter of the same people at play—minus the instructor—and the thud of an English football. The discipline at both ends is improving, and if the baggy-trousered recruit looks, questionable as a soldier, let it be said that he looks, when stripped, the *beau ideal* of an athlete made for sport.

A few yards away from the official settlement, stands the mission-house of the American mission to the Karen. The missionary has been absent for a year and the affairs of the little community are managed by its elders. They hold a service on Sundays, and the friendly airs of their hymns, coming across the little strip of jungle that divides them from the white community,

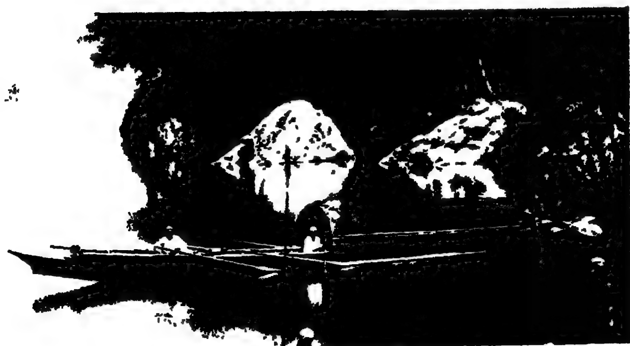
make a pleasant interlude in the stillness of the day. The congregation is a small one, and the hill tracts of the Salwin appear to have been but very partially absorbed into the missionary fold. The chief elder is a young man named Moung Lon Le, with a refined and clerkly face, and English which he talks with an American drawl. He seems to feel acutely the general backwardness of his race.

Apart from these exotic advantages, Pha-pun—the primitive site, as the Creator made it—is a place of great natural beauty. Behind it there rise, in fold behind fold, a mass of exquisite hills, tapestried with woods; and their colouring, where they reach away in faint waves to the north, is, at this season, of such soft and delicate tones as go to the making of an English landscape after rain on a summer day. Facing these hills on the west, there is another line of hills, beginners of the Paung-Laung range, and between them lies all there is of the valley of the Yunzalin.

The little river is spanned at the landing-place by a temporary bridge of bamboos, raised only a few inches above its surface, and the waters pour clear and limpid under it. There are rapids just below, which for the last time strain the muscles of the polers ascending to Pha-pun, and all through the still hours of the night I can hear their murmur as they break over the stones. Sleeping, I dream of the Jarlot and the Queffleut where they mingle at Morlaix.

Above the bridge, there is a long stretch of silent water, winding in easy curves, and almost flush with the

low grassy banks. The mystic beauty of the Lower Salwin, the stately pomp of the Irrawaddy, the sad grey wastes of some Indian river, toiling through spaces it cannot fill—there is no hint of these on the banks of the Yunzalin as I look upon it to-day at Pha-pun. There is little happily to detract from its homely English beauty. But the human note is essentially Eastern. Women bare to the shoulder come to the river's edge to bathe and to fill their waterpots; small lads splash about on rafts of green bamboo; groups of wayfaring Shan ford it at the shallows; and elephant-men scrub their restless beasts, lying prone and immersed to the skull in the water. By the bridge a fleet of Chittagonian boats lies at anchor—the only link that binds Pha-pun to the outer world.



CHITTAGONIAN BOATMEN

Book X

OVER THE PAUNG-LAUNG HILLS

CHAPTER XXXIX

OVER THE PAUNG-LAUNG HILLS

FROM Pha-pun, the traveller who would re-enter Burma without making the long return to Moulmein can do so only by crossing the Paung-Laung hills, which are the watershed between the Sittang and the Yunzalin. But the road is rough and wild, the jungle dense, the people primitive. Shelter for the night is often unobtainable, food is scarce when it is to be had at all, and transport is not easily procured. Yet, until he makes such a journey as this, one who would taste the full flavour of Far Eastern life is likely to go away unappeased.

Having, through the good offices of the district magistrate, secured the services of two elephants, with Karen drivers, to carry my baggage, it remained only to gather some idea of the route and the distances to be traversed. Many persons were called into consultation, and all claimed to have some knowledge of the facts, either from personal travel or from the talk of the country-side; but no two of them could be prevailed upon to agree. However, the mission elder

sent word to the Karen villages in the hills that I was going through; and the police inspector furnished me with two constables, one of whom had once before made the journey. The other was a typical "fat boy," with a laughing face and a radical love of ease, which came to be sorely tried during our progress over the hills. For three days I had been detained at Pha-pun by fever, the penalty of the Yunzalin; but on February 14th I was ready to start.

At this, if at any time of the year, I was entitled to hope for fine weather; but heavy rain overtook me soon after I had topped the first line of hills, within six miles of Pha-pun. There is nothing more melancholy than tramping through a sodden jungle, with fever in one's bones, and no definite prospect of shelter for the night; and it seemed to me, as I toiled painfully behind my party, that I had embarked on a very foolish enterprise. Happily, as the day wore on I found shelter in a wayside hut, and settled in it for the night

I awoke the following morning feeling ill and dull, as one does who wakes after a late night and broken sleep in a closed room; but there had been no late night here, and the room was as clean and airy as any of nature's own sleeping-places. It was the fever that was still in my system, at war with the quinine I had taken during the past week, and morning and evening, during this journey I had to continue the struggle, till the fever was finally vanquished.



THE KAREN MISSION AT PHA-PUN

The first sound that fell upon my ears as I lay abed came from a Shan caravan on its way from the farther Salwin. The pack-bullocks passed one by one in a long procession under my door, and it seemed to me as I dozed that the air was laden with the music of an endless host of bells. I spent all the forenoon in drying my things, and making preparations for rain during future marches, and I could not but admire the skill with which the Karens plied their heavy *dahs* on the bamboos, from great trunks which they felled with ease to strips for thongs, which they peeled off as thin as brown paper. There was neither pause nor hesitation; every stroke of the sharp weapon, heavy enough to kill a man, reached its goal. Here were artists at work, unconscious of their own grace and skill, the product of centuries of usage. Like all perfect work it seemed very simple, till a native of India, from a country where bamboos are unknown, tried his hand at cutting a few strips for the fire, and failed completely.

At last the elephants were laden and started out on their journey to Na-Khaw-Khé, and I waited another hour to give them time, for Leviathan is a slow mover. Sunlight and shadow came and went, as I lay there at peace in the wayside hut. Travellers at long intervals passed by: Shan and Burman, Karen and Coringhi; most curious of all a half-caste in a sombrero, the son of a British officer, a little man with a fluent manner, a dash of servility, more than a dash of covert pride, and the gift of tongues. From a neighbouring

sawpit there came the steady "swish" of a steel saw at work.

The hut in which I had passed the night drew my closer attention. It was made entirely of bamboo, save the thatch, which was of palm-leaves. There was not a nail in its composition. Its framework was of round bamboos of graduated size, and its walls and floor were of hammered bamboo. It was cheap, it was ephemeral, and it let in the sun and the cold; but it was new, and clean, and in harmony with its surroundings. The tent is for the desert Arab; a bamboo hut at every resting-place is its happy equivalent in Burma.

At two o'clock in the afternoon I set out for Na-Khaw-Khé, and the track I followed ran along a level, through aisles of overarching bamboo. The country was similar to that I had traversed the previous day, but the sky showed blue overhead, the sun shone through the glades of the forest, and in the place of gloom there was rejoicing. At four I reached my destination, a hamlet of little bamboo houses strung along the wayside. There were signs of petty trade here, and green vegetables were exposed for sale in small packets done up in plantain-leaves, for passing travellers. At the farther end the Shan caravan of the morning was outspanned on a plain near the village monastery.

Passing on, I crossed a stream bridged by a single tree, and so came to the *sa-khan*, or travellers' "eating place." The three or four huts, neat, clean, and attractive



THE CARAVAN

as usual, were already occupied by parties of Shan and Burmese. My elephants had gone on, so while a messenger went to call them back, I waited in the shelter of one of the huts.

It is an unfailing charm of travel in these countries that the traveller is left alone by the people he meets. The innate good-breeding of these races sweetens the atmosphere of the land they live in and one is often happier therefore amongst them, in a wayside hut, than in the midst of more imposing surroundings, where the strain is coarse. No one, as I sat here alone, came to pry, or to ask me questions, and no one was in a hurry to be abject or useful. My coming, though the passing of an Englishman must be of rare occurrence in these wilds, seemed to make no sensible difference to the occupants of the hut, or to my other neighbours. Each man pursued his vocation; one sang as he collected some bits of bamboo for a fire, another went gravely to and fro fetching water from the stream; a third cleaned rice for the evening meal—each had his laugh and his joke in season. Not that there was any question of ignoring the stranger, for a strip of Brussels carpet quietly found its way to where I sat, and an English folding chair, the pride of its possessor, was dusted and set up for my comfort. At a word they were willing to vacate any one of the houses which sheltered them, but they made no fuss in anticipation.

And for my part I was more than content to sit down quietly in their midst. One big fellow exercised a decoy-cock, another displayed a gorgeous pheasant

bred by himself, a third was a crafty man at dove-noosing; and all were happily free from the squalid poverty of the nearer East.

Although these men were roughing it, so to speak, in the jungle, as travellers away from home, they were possessed of flexible sleeping mats, coloured rugs, tumblers, and drinking mugs. They had time for leisurely meals, and they ceased work at sunset. While waiting for the rice to boil, they sipped tea from small Chinese cups, chewed betel, and smoked cheroots. Good-humour and consideration for each other prevailed to a remarkable degree amongst them. Each man seemed to do his share of such work as entailed co-operation without any pressure. They were all on the best of terms, and all the evening, though there was much hilarity, and voices were raised in story-telling and laughter, there was no note of anger or quarrel. The Madrasi cook hectored the Karen within his radius and quarrelled with the Mohammedan peon. The European censured the dulness of the guide who had misled him the previous day. But bland good-humour was the atmosphere of the Shan-Burmese encampment. What a precious quality it is!

I do not suggest that these people are angels without wings, or even that they are incapable of truculent rage; but many years of life and travel in Burma have convinced me that in the minor self-control which sweetens human relationships, they far surpass the white man. I shall not easily forget these pleasant hours in this little clearing in the jungle. How the slant sun



THE HEAD OF THE CARAVAN

sent his broad shafts of light through the shady places! How clear was the air, and pure, after the previous day's tribulation of rain! How the quiet life of the place unfolded itself before me with the interest of a play!

As the evening closed in, men who had been at work came back from their toil; carpenters, with their tools over their shoulders, from the new bridge across a neighbouring stream; herdsmen with their droves of red cattle; labourers with their mattocks. A small world of travelling men drew up and gathered at the *sa-khan* for the night; and the Shan with his red wallet, his flapping hat and his *dah* across his shoulders; a Burman party of traders from Kyaikto; a *pothoodaw* in semi-clerical guise, a rosary in his hand. The cooking fires were lit and the rice began to boil and simmer in the pot; and groups of men sat round the smoking food to eat it with their hands. Thereafter white cheroots, and story-telling, and ease; and so, as the night closed in, while bugles were blowing in far-away centres of life—sleep. The broad laugh, the bland voice, were stilled in slumber, and no sound prevailed save the cheeping of the crickets, the murmur of running water, the intermittent call of the night-jar, and the crash of the elephants feeding in the jungle.

Tinka-linka, tinka-linka, tink—tink—tink,
Tinka-linka, tinka-linka, tlink—tlink—tlink.

The melody of bells, now in unison, now in *échelon*, as the speed of the cattle varied, for a long while filled the stillness of the dawn. There is some quality in

this music, some suggestion in this early passing by of the caravan, which steals with a subtle fascination over the senses. It stands in some sort for the romance of wayfaring, for the poetry of the vagrant life. The bells and the red cattle and the white-hatted Shan, as they emerge from the stillness of the forest, come nearer and yet nearer in the grey dawn; pass by with the added bass of hoofs, and are lost in the chambered stillness; and this at that mystic hour when the spirit of the listener still hovers on the borderland between the slumber of the night and the full awakening of the sun-clad morning. Only once before, and in another country, have I heard such music, with its infinite appeal. But it came neither from bells nor caravans; but from the shepherd's pipe of a lad from the Pyrenees, who came away each year with his herd of goats, browsing as they wandered over France, till, in the early days of spring, he reached the small provincial town in which I lived. From door to door the lad piped, while the shaggy travellers stood still, and small householders came forth with cups and bowls for a little of the goat's milk. But to me, as to many others, it seemed that he came each year as the messenger of spring.

By six o'clock the elephants were laden for the day's journey, and I set out on my wayfaring. My fellow-travellers were already afoot, and of the hilarious camp of the previous night, only the carpenters remained, leisurely peeling bamboo strips to mend the roof against the rain.



From a painting by J. R. Middleton

My way wound across rice-fields and embankments; the dew lay heavy on the stubble and the grass, chanticleer crowed lustily from the edge of the jungle; and the sunlight streamed in great waves across the valley through which I was passing. But in a very little while I broke away from human settlements, and became immersed in the cloistral gloom and silence of the forest. Under my feet the dead leaves lay, moist and clammy from the recent rain; overhead the bamboos met, leaving but faint glimpses of the sky. Jungle-fowl dashed away with astonishing agility on my approach; great pied hornbills flew with whirring pinions across the upper world of the forest; turtle-doves murmured from the leafy recesses; monkeys swept along their overhead pathways; a



THROUGH THE FOREST

wild cat, startled from its lair, bounded into the undergrowth.

The pathway was carpeted in places with the petals of tree-flowers, scarlet, and pale heliotrope, and crinkled white and pink. From time to time a forest stream, clear, shallow, and silver-tongued, crossed my path. Footprints of men and elephants graven on its crisp sands; betel-vines growing up some stately tree, a Karen tree-ladder, struck the human note in a tremulous minor key. As I progressed, the bamboos became supreme, and for miles I tramped in their company alone; ascending hills, walking for awhile along their crests, descending, and again *da capo*, with no sign of the outside world, but such as came from an occasional glimpse of some sun-clad hill-slope, blue in the distance. Hills in fact lay all about me, and views of an extensive world, but forbidden to me in my bamboo tunnel.

In time I came out of it, and into a fire-track, wide as a national highway, punctuated by cairns and cross-posts with the Government mark upon them. So I knew that I had come within the radius of the Forest Act, and at a cross-road I came upon a *kyaw-nya-sa* or public notice, printed in Burmese and signed by an Englishman, forbidding all travellers between January and June to smoke by the wayside, or otherwise bring about a jungle fire and so endanger His Majesty's teak plantations. Under this notice, a party of Shan travellers sat taking a passing rest; amongst them, a monk, a woman, and an infant of two years of age. The rank and file of the party smoked

placidly from English pipes, unashamed and unconscious of the terrors of the law detailed in the document over their heads.

About noon I came to the river of May-wine, my resting-place being just beyond it. The indigenous



THE BAMBOO AISLES OF THE FOREST

traveller is not for a moment stayed by such an obstacle. His loose trousers swing up with the facility of a stage-curtain, and his tattooed limbs descend into the water. Even as I arrived, a party in this guise, with packs across their shoulders, and oiled-silk hats flapping in the sun, was fording the stream. It is another

matter for the white man, equipped with boots and European garments.

It is well that this is recognised by the people of the country. A woman who sat at work on the farther shore, seeing me, ran off for some thongs of peeled bamboo, a couple of Shan came hurrying up from a plantain-grove, a raft was constructed in a trice, and pushed across to where I stood. From there it was gently pushed back again, and so as it touched the pebbles of the west bank, I stepped ashore at May-wine.

A few yards away on the river's bank was the rest-house, a little bamboo structure of two rooms and an open verandah, built by the villagers. The Kyi-dan-gyi, or headman, brought an offering of papayas, another fetched water for the kitchen, while a third filled a couple of goblets at the river. After which they all sat down in a friendly way on the floor, and smoked pipes, and talked.

In the afternoon the rain, which came just as I had found this welcome shelter, ceased; the sun shone out, and I took a stroll in the village. I found it a Shan village, peopled from Pha-pun, Bilin, and Toungoo, some ten years ago. It ran to forty houses, which clustered along narrow lanes, shady with jack and horse-radish trees, the papaya and the plantain. Betel-vines grew on trellises before the doors, and small gardens displayed beds of chillies, beans, and pineapples. The cottages were of thatch and bamboo, with plank floors, and wooden posts and rails. Most

of them were large and airy, with projecting roofs, under which the people sat cleaning rice, and pursuing their household avocations. There were reception-rooms open to the street, and bedrooms on a higher level behind. Seclusion finds no place in the economy of the farther East.

Many of these front rooms were shops, in which broad-cloth, silk trousers, tinned stores, and groceries were exhibited for sale. In all, there was a quiet corner garnished with shrubs in pots and flower vases, sacred to the house spirit. Even in the rest-houses along the road I noticed masonic signs, which showed that the cult of the house spirit had not been neglected. Nearly every inhabitant was an agricultural labourer, the village being the centre of a wide circle of rice *kwins*, rough at this season with the harvest stubble. The garnered rice was stored in mat cylinders under the eaves of the houses.

The only artisan of the village, a blacksmith, was occupied in a leisurely artistic way in designing an iron *hti* or umbrella for the village monastery. This building, with its thatched palm roof and plain architecture, made no great claim to distinction. The collection of images of the Buddha within it was a curious one, and it purported to have come from Mandalay; but there was a total absence of the conventional Burmese type. Some were of wood, and most might well have come from some cave-collection, the hoarding of ages, like that at Kaw-gun.

The house of the Kyi-dan-gyi was no larger or

finer than that of his neighbours, and the man himself differed in no respect from them, save in this, that he was the responsible head, and obliged therefore, by the laws of hospitality and of the Government, to make himself useful and attentive.

The chief peculiarity of the village lay in its complete lack of young people over ten years of age. There were some old men and women, and a number of babes at the breast, and urchins at the monastery; the rest were grown men and women, neither girls growing into full womanhood nor boys within reach of manhood. This peculiarity was clearly due to the age of the village. The ten years that had passed since it had been founded (by an old man, at the time of my visit sixty years of age, and still living in the village), had, it seemed to me, been well spent. There was an air of homeliness about the little settlement; the jack-trees had grown taller than the houses; the *kwins* had multiplied; herds of buffaloes grazed in its precincts; and three miles away, the village, I was told, had thrown out a hamlet of five houses, which was itself extending.

Exploring in this way, and talking to a villager as I went, I returned at last to the rest-house, and passed away an hour or more beside the river. It was pleasant to sit there smoking and watch idly the flight of water-fowl high overhead; to trace the five-pointed foliage and the scarlet bloom of the cotton-trees, patterned against the blue sky; to follow the passing glory of the sunset, and the ceaseless monotonous



AT THE RIVER OF MAY-WINE

change on the face of the little river. For in truth there was some serene quality in this place, which made it, for all its remoteness and its isolation, attractive, and as the evening faded, it passed insensibly into the category of places in the world I would fain re-visit.

The next morning there was a dense fog in the valley of the river, and the sun was long up before I could make certain of the sky. It had rained hard during the night; but in a little while the sky showed blue and clear, the fog-curtain rolled away, and I no longer had any hesitation in setting out. But now there was unlooked-for trouble with the elephant-men, who had grown sullen and wished to return. They were persuaded, however, to proceed.

We made a very long and tiring march that day, and though we got away by seven, the elephants did not reach their destination until half-past two, and it was three before I got any breakfast. On my way I passed the new hamlet of which I had been told, and there were symptoms of Karen villages, evident in plantations of the betel-palm, in *taung-gya* clearings, and in rough bamboo fences with wickets across the road.

From one of these a slight footpath led away to a village, but neither this nor any other village throughout my route, although I was travelling through a Karen country, was visible to my eyes as I went. This Karen instinct of concealment furnishes, in itself, an epitome of the history of the race.

My road lay at first along the edge of the *kwins*, and through patches of dripping forest, and over the river levels buried in tall grass, in which the elephants became invisible. But for the most part I walked on the soft, yellow leaves, through tunnels of bamboos many miles long. I crossed the May-wine river four times, and on each occasion the little fat policeman found a new vocation in carrying me over on his back. Happily he was as strong as he was lazy.

Once, in the course of my journey, I met a Shan caravan on its way from Shwe-gyin, to which I was proceeding, and as it went by me, it filled the forest with its music. The road was level on the whole, but there were short ascents and descents, at each of which, although I was shut in in the bamboo tunnels, I could tell that I was negotiating the minor hills that run across the valley levels between Pha-pun and Shwe-gyin. But, so far, except on the first day, I had had very little hard climbing. My camp for the night was pitched near Maw-pu, a Karen village of twenty-three souls, all of whom had to be named, before the headman could tell me its population.

The village itself was invisible; but half a dozen villagers, amongst whom I recognised a man who had been presented to me at Pha-pun by the mission elder, came to see me at the *sa-khan*, where the accommodation was rougher than any I had yet encountered. Yet the locality had its charm. A thousand betel-palms stood about it in erect beauty; blue hills towered over the little valley, shutting it in; a stream murmured

incessantly a few yards away. The place was wild, with the desolation of primitive nature, and of a narrow valley shut in by lofty hills. It lacked the open charm of May-wine. Yet for an hour or more, when we were all rested and the cooking fires were lit under the trees, and the blue smoke curled upwards, as the last rays of sunlight streamed through the encompassing forest, there was a smile upon its face.

All through the night I caused a watch to be kept upon the elephant-men, lest they should decamp and leave me derelict in the jungle; and more than once I was awakened by the crashing of the great beasts in the jungle, to find a solitary figure taking his turn beside the flickering lantern, which threw its circle of pale light over the other sleepers. Thus I knew that the watch was being kept.

We were all up by five o'clock the next morning; but it took us two hours to make a start, because of the loading of the baggage and the sullenness of the drivers. Part of the freight consisted of green cocoanuts, which had a particular attraction for the elephants, and it was amusing to see them reaching out their trunks for them while every one was busy with the baggage. Occasionally they succeeded in purloining one, and crushed it open with their forefeet. There is an endless fascination in the ways of elephants, that beguiles many an hour of tedious travel, when they form part of one's retinue.

This day we had not gone a hundred yards when we struck a bad bit of ground, along the slippery hill-

side, and simultaneously came upon a Shan caravan moving towards us. The elephants trumpeted with fear and swung round in their tracks, the bullocks of the caravan dashed in scattered groups into the jungle, whence they surveyed us with eyes of fear; bells jangled, the caravan-men shouted in dismay, and the only progress we made was towards May-wine as the elephants shuffled along the hillside like a pair of nervous pantaloons.

The caravan was at last got out of the way, and the elephants were bullied and coaxed into facing the slippery fragment of road, which they did with immense circumspection, leaning heavily against the hillside, using their trunks for support, and making certain of the safe lodgment of three feet, before adventuring the fourth.

Once before I had been placed in a similar, but rather worse, predicament. I was making my way up the Shan plateau, from the railway at Pyinmana to the site of a projected sanatorium at Byingyi, six thousand feet above the sea. The path was barely five feet wide and in bad repair—a mere scratch on the hillside, which climbed in a steep slope on one side of it, and descended in precipices on the other to the bed of the valley. Twenty yards ahead, my elephant, filling the entire road, was taking his ponderous and stately way; behind him I rode on my small Burmese pony. For two hours or more we had been marching in this fashion, climbing foot by foot to the summit of Byingyi. Then, of a sudden, a mad trumpeting

filled the air, and in a flash Leviathan swung round and came thundering down the narrow track. My pony turned and fled before him. For a mile or more this pursuit continued, the elephant shrieking with fear, his driver clutching at the iron goad he had succeeded in inserting into his skull, and calling anathemas upon every relative of the great beast he could name. At last the pace slackened, and the whole breathless party of us came to a stand. The elephant, not yet reassured, twitched all over with fear, distracted between the fiend upon his back and the fiend he had not dared to face.



RAFTMAN AT MAY-WINE

I called upon the driver for an explanation.

"Sir," he replied, "the accursed beast—may his mother be dishonoured and his sister put to shame—the accursed beast took fright at a wasp."

Three years previously it appeared they had travelled this way, and the elephant had been stung by a wasp. The memory of this adventure assailed him as he approached the scene of it, and, seeing at the same moment one of his ancient enemies, he turned and fled.

"Nothing, Presence," added the *mahout*, "will induce this bastard to face that corner of the road."

The evening was closing in, we had come too far to turn back with any hope of shelter for the night; our destination was still several miles ahead. A precipice lay on our right, a steep hill covered with dense bamboo forest and sodden with mould rose up on our left. I could see no escape from the dilemma. But the driver knew his beast.

"I will make the infamous one climb the hill," he said, "and descend again on the farther side of the wasps' nest."

"Son of a disreputable mother," he added, addressing the mammoth under him, "climb this hill," and thereupon there followed such an exhibition of sagacity and skill as one who has never seen an elephant in a difficulty might deem incredible.

The driver, it may be remarked, was an Indian. Burman and Karen are less searchingly personal in their abuse.

To return to my journey from Maw-pu. The country I met as I went proved to be very similar to that I had hitherto traversed; bamboo-hidden pathways, flat patches of rice *kwins*, streams and rivulets. But

it was more mountainous, and I was evidently traversing a loftier barrier than any I had hitherto encountered. Steep ascents and sharp descents followed each other; splendid masses of wooded hill and mountain towered above me, where openings in the forest gave any glimpse of the landscape. Grassy peaks and stony crags and precipices spoke of grandeur; and cool moist forests, with streams rushing and tumbling through them, provided a welcome variation from the monotonous beauty of the bamboo.

There were signs of human tenure on the charred hill-slopes where *taung-gya* cutters had been at work, and in the valley bottoms, where forests of areca-palms grew luxuriantly along the stream's edge; but as usual not a single village was visible.

About half-way to my destination, I came upon a party of Karen, building a rest-house of green bamboos, by the brink of a charming rivulet. They toiled, but with the utmost indolence, and spent far more time in pounding areca-nut, which they chew with betel-leaf, and in smoking their queer little pipes, than in actual labour.

Betel-chewing, the fashionable vice of Burma, is carried by these people to the last extreme. The process with them is so continuous as to be perpetual. The last I saw of the assembled villagers of Maw-pu, as the dusk closed in on the night of my stay amongst them, was of a party of squalid men in *déshabille*—the Paung-Laung Karen always suggests *déshabille*—pounding and chewing betel, reaching prehensile fingers for betel-boxes, trickling as to their gums; and in the

grey dawn, as I opened my eyes, they rested upon the same components of the same spectacle. The sinner who lights one cigarette at the butt-end of its predecessor is an archangel to the betel-chewing Karen.

Their type of face is peculiar. In the eyes of the younger generation there is the steady gaze of the primitive and squalid savage, dully curious as to the novel objects about him. In the eyes of the older men there is a note of melancholy, of invincible sadness, that seems to reflect the hereditary experience of the race. The women reach a certain plump comeliness during the brief season that intervenes between childhood and motherhood. Children of both sexes have few pretensions to beauty. One seldom sees here the engaging prettinesses of Burmese children. What there is of childish charm lies in their sloe-like eyes; their faces are invariably overlaid with dirt.

The married women soon grow slovenly, careworn, and wrinkled. It is little wonder, for, besides enduring all the pains and cares of maternity, they seem to do most of the hard work. They pound rice by the hour, wielding the heavy wooden pounder, which is in harsh contrast to their slender arms. They carry water in large hollow bamboos long distances from the stream's edge; they cook and weave, and when met with on the highway, travelling with their men, appear to do most of the porterage.

Their garments look less squalid than those of the men, possibly because they are darker in colour, and therefore show the dirt less. No Puritan could desire

a costume better calculated to conceal the human form than that of the Karen woman. There is a skirt which reaches to the ankles, there is a long, loose robe, reaching half-way down to the knees. The sleeves are cut short, and the robe, which is open in a small V-shape fore and aft, has rather the effect of a gorgeous surplice, when it is new. It is much less prone to slip over the shoulder than the corresponding male garment, which is for ever askew. The colours of the women's garments are red and blue, and when new, they look very neat and attractive. The skirt is crossed by a wide blue band, and it ends in a scarlet strip about four inches wide. The upper robe is embroidered in horizontal and vertical patterns. Both men and women wear beads, the necklaces of the women being larger and prettier than those of the men. Bracelets of silver, clasped to the forearm, are also worn.

A KAREN VILLAGE

I had meant to camp at Nyaung-tha-da; but it proved to be an open camping ground by the wayside, without shelter of any kind. There was a village in the neighbourhood, although as usual it was quite invisible to the eye, and this I now sought out along a narrow hidden pathway, which gave no sign of being the main approach.

Half a mile or more brought me to a mountain stream full of boulders and deep pools, across which there was no obvious passage; but I sighted a party

of Karen higher up, employed in fishing, and two of them, considerably startled, led me across its devious stepping-stones to the village.

The next symptom of life I met was a herd of buffaloes, which came plunging and snorting through the long grass to look at me; and I was warned that there was a "wild" buffalo in the neighbourhood, of whom even the Karen lived in terror. I was destined, as it happened, to make a closer acquaintance with this potentate.

Leaving the herd and the thicker jungle, I came upon some *taung-gya* clearings, where the new leaves were just bursting out of the charred trunks. Then suddenly, and not till I was right into it, I came for the first time in sight of the village. The *taung-gya* wreckage extended right up to the posts of the houses; there was no attempt either at a clearing or an enclosure.

The appearance presented by the village itself was almost comic. It looked as if it was tottering under the effects of an earthquake, or as if the houses had suddenly taken to strong drink. There was not a straight line in their composition; bamboos of all descriptions and at all angles lay scattered about; some in mere piles resting against the walls, others thrown out as buttresses to the posts on which the houses were built. In the forefront of all there stood the dilapidated remnants of an abandoned house, to complete a picture of trumpery disorder. The houses stood to each other at a variety of angles, two being long barracks with accommodation for several families.

A violent creaking of bamboos set up within, as I approached, followed by a sudden silence. Then eyes began to peer at chinks in the bamboo walls, and fingers fell surreptitiously to work, to widen these apertures for a better view. Whenever my eyes crossed a pair of eyes behind the chinks, they were immediately withdrawn.


THE HUT AT MAY-WINE

The first sign I made of a nearer approach was followed by sudden agitation within, and the tumultuous creaking of bamboo floors. But for these symptoms, the village might have contained no human inhabitants.

The houses were, as a matter of fact, swarming with a population of men, women, and children, all of whom were stricken, as wild beasts are, with simultaneous fear and curiosity. When I summoned them a little later, through some of the leading men, to be photographed on the verandahs of their houses, there was a display of men, of small boys and children, and a few wrinkled and awful hags. The young and the

presumably good-looking kept strictly within. The old story.

But as the evening grew, and I was myself out of sight, the women of the village came out to fill water, and pound rice for the evening meal. I passed a quiet hour on the balcony of my house, looking south, where the blue hills rose up in outline beyond the jungle, and sunset tints were flashed on the scattered clouds. It was a beautiful view, of the kind the Karen has looked upon with little profit for unnumbered generations.

The village is built on rising ground, under the shelter of a lofty mountain on the west. The near neighbourhood of this, with its dense forests, provides the necessary retreat, in the event of a panic. Small low hills rise parallel to it on the east. In the narrow space between, a stream babbles on its way, and hosts of areca-palms find sustenance along it. Such is the village.

My house was square in shape, with a roof of bamboos cut in two and laid like tiles, leaving open an air and smoke space of a yard between it and the top of the walls. There was a lower inner framework of roof, which served as a storing place for spare bamboos, and this made it impossible for me, who am more than five feet high, to stand erect within. The walls were of hammered bamboo, of the giant *wabo* species, and there were no partitions ; but a place was set apart for a fire, and there was a little alcove at one end where waterpots were stored. The one doorway faced away from the village, and could not boast of a door. The

floor was raised about ten feet on piles, and a bamboo ladder, narrowing as it reached the ground, was the means of climbing up to it. The furniture consisted of cooking-pots and paddy-bins. It was quite tolerably clean and open to the air and sunlight. Children, dogs, pigs, fowls, and ducks quacked, crowed, grunted, growled, and prattled below. At night the starlit sky was visible at the openings of the roof.

My preparations for a start began at four o'clock the next morning, for a long march lay before us and we were all anxious now to reach Shwe-gyin. However interesting such journeys may be, there is a strain involved in them, which quickly begins to tell, both on man and beast. Of my party all were showing signs of fatigue, and my Burmese writer was on the verge of breaking down. For the Burman, although a fine man physically when brought up in the country, becomes a weakling when he resides in large towns, and rapidly deteriorates when he takes to an office stool. Frequently, when I have been travelling in the remoter parts of Burma, my Burman clerks have been the first to succumb to malarial fever, and have seldom been able to take any hand in the physical pursuits that men readily fall to when on the march ; such as the carrying of a gun, or the felling of log for firewood. And when Moung San Nyun, who accompanied me on this journey, tried to use a punting pole on the Yunzalin, he merely succeeded in falling into the water.

But it was not only the men of my party who

now began to show traces of the strain of travel. Each day the elephants took longer to accomplish the twenty miles or so I aimed at; each day they grew visibly thinner, and the drivers complained that they were not given sufficient time in which to feed. There was some truth in their contention; for the elephant who depends on the jungle for his sustenance has practically to feed all day to fill himself. In this and in many other respects elephant transport is unsatisfactory; yet the fact remains that the elephant, huge as he is, and unwieldly as he looks, will travel where no other pack-animal can go at all.

Before leaving the village, I paid a visit to one of the long barracks, and found it to consist of a series of four rooms, similar to mine, and opening into each other. They were extremely dirty, and the floor, which was of the slightest character, shook at every step I took. Their denizens had fled before my approach, and they must have presented to an onlooker outside a very comic picture, as they hastily crowded down the narrow ladders at one end, while I entered at the other. Two minutes was as much as I could endure, at that early hour, of the terrible amalgam of smells that greeted me on entering. My own cottage of the previous night had been happily free from offence in this respect. This I attributed to the fact that it was much newer, that it had no pigstye under it, and that it probably belonged to a young couple beginning life, and was therefore neater and less populated than the other houses.



MARCHING THROUGH THE ARECA-PALMS

Again, when on the point of departing, I noticed women's faces peering through chinks in the bamboo walls, each one being instantly withdrawn, like the head of a turtle, on discovery. I have given them a somewhat limited character for beauty, but I am obliged to say that many of them look very well in their marching costume, which leaves their arms and shoulders bare, and shows them to be fair and plump. But on meeting a white man on the road, they look startled, pause, and seem in two minds whether to stand their ground or fly. The smallest advance on his part would certainly scatter them like jungle-fowl, and at the best they generally make a détour, and get out of reach as quickly as possible. I sometimes wonder in what monstrous character I must, inadvertently, have appeared to these timid creatures; and when I reflect on the natural gaiety of all the Indo-Chinese people, and on the charm and curiosity of the sex, I am haunted with a suspicion that at least a portion of their disinclination to be seen is due to the tutelage of their men. I fear that I must have been painted by them in the most sombre colours.

Soon after we started, my elephants having preceded me by an hour, I came upon a strange scene of devastation. I found my baggage scattered in fragments over the jungle; my followers shouting wildly to each other, but invisible; and a single elephant, his ears flapping, his trunk waving to and fro, and his small eyes twinkling with excitement and fear. His fellow, it seemed, had been called upon to do battle

by the wild buffalo whose fame had reached my ears the previous day, and he had promptly dashed off in abject flight through the jungle. The path he had taken was strewn for some little way with the débris of his harness, and presently I came upon the driver, who had, by some miracle, fallen off without breaking his neck.

From that day to this I have never seen or heard anything of the fugitive. Several of my cases, containing wine and soda-water, were broken in pieces. Let me hope that the flowers that bloom there now betoken some memory of this libation.

My great fear was for my negatives of the Yunzalin, and others which now illustrate this narrative. These I had packed daily with my own hand, and they were happily preserved. But for the space of three weeks I lived in suspense, for I could not develop them sooner.

I had now had enough of elephants. The only beast that remained could not carry all my baggage, and I was in no mind to risk a further misadventure. I therefore despatched my two constables to the village to impress a number of porters, and with the aid of these people I continued my journey. The road climbed a steep hill, that was densely wooded and very cool and moist. Scarcely any direct sunlight penetrated its gloom. I reached the crest of the pass an hour before noon, and thereafter my way lay along bamboo-covered slopes, and over valley-levels watered by numerous streams, which I crossed and recrossed with tiresome frequency.

At half-past two o'clock in the afternoon, I came

to a halt, at the *zayat* of Yeboo village. My servants did not arrive till five o'clock. They all looked thoroughly beaten, and two of them went down with fever. They had been afoot since four o'clock in the morning, and on the march for nearly twelve hours Below the *zayat* there was a pretty stream, and across this, to fill up the interval between my arrival and theirs, I had myself carried, to shoot jungle-fowl in some *kwins* on the farther side. Beyond them rose a range of blue hills shutting in the valley.

On my return, I found that a caravan, of some mixed breed of Karen, had come in. Both animals and pack-saddles were precisely similar to those of the Shan. But the bells were of bamboo, and I missed the fuller music of the Shan bells.

The pack-saddle used throughout these regions is a very simple contrivance, of two pillows tightly packed, and placed on the animal's back at an angle of fifty degrees. Upon these the wooden frame holding a pannier at each end is deposited. A tailpiece, consisting of a rope strung out from a curved bamboo, helps in a measure to balance the panniers. No girths are employed, and balance, if I am to judge from the manner in which the panniers oscillate, alone retains them in position. The panniers are tilted slightly forward, and lie well over the animal's withers. The cattle, mainly of the ruddy colour that is common in Burma, are well trained, and stand motionless while the business of loading is in progress, but move off immediately the signal to start is given.

Tired as I was, it was long past midnight before I slept. The *zayat* was open to the night, and sheltered me only from the dew, but I was grateful for the shelter it gave me. The stars shone brilliantly in the rich dome of the sky; all my camp lay in deep slumber. The night was still, but for the never-ceasing music of the stream; and it seemed to me, as I lay alone, awake, as if my spirit, disembodied, had been caught up by some mystic influence, into the very heart of life. I have never felt this sensation in a civilised environment.

The next morning I made another early start, and saw the sun come up over the hills, throwing long shadows across the dew-laden *kwins*. There was one small climb, and then steady marching along the Taung-salé, which gradually widened into a river as I went. I had to cross it many times, to my discomfort, and to that of the little fat policeman who had to carry me. It flows in a direction which is opposite to that of the Bilin, the May-wine, and most of the other streams along this road, and I knew from this that I had finally crossed the watershed. I met a caravan of elephants and Burmans going to Muang-Lem; men, women, children, and a baby elephant. The Burmans *shekoed* and made obeisances of respect from their high wicker panniers, and looked distinctly relieved at meeting an Englishman on the path of their exodus. It was not such a far-away land after all.

By two o'clock I came to the village of Kyaung-Wa, and knew that I was back in Burma. The *zayat*, or rest-house, though plain, was of the substantial Burmese



THE VILLAGE

type, of timber and iron; the women were placid and dignified, and not at all disposed to run away; the men were quiet and courteous and appreciative of distinctions unknown to the untutored Karen. The headman proved himself to be a polite and sagacious gentleman; a peasant, but also a man of the world.

Rich orchards of guavas, papayas, palms, and other fruit trees confirmed in me the impression I had formed as I came, of a country that is rich in little valleys, and wooded hill-slopes, and running waters. It seemed to me that in the hands of a progressive community, all this country, instead of being a sealed wilderness, might become famous for its orchards, its populous villages, and its beauty. I have met with few natural sites more charming in a minor key than that of May-wine, no country happier in its cool forests and innumerable streams.

The next day I pushed on to the village of Taung-salé-zeik, and leaving it behind me, emerged abruptly, about eleven of the clock, into open country. It was with a feeling of pleasure that I looked again, after a detention of three weeks amongst mountains and forests, on open and wide-reaching plains. The slightly undulating landscape, spreading away in soft blue-green outlines to the horizon, seemed to me scarcely at all Eastern in character. Presently I reached the edge of the Shwe-gyin river, near its junction with the Sittang, and on the farther shore, in the peninsula between the two rivers, there spread in a long curving line the town of Shwe-gyin.

And here I must point out that it is only after a stay in the hill country, amongst backward races, that the traveller can really appreciate the nature and extent of Burmese civilisation. Here, it was evident, were a people capable of living together in large communities



KYAUNG-WA

and in permanent homes. High up, where the curving Shwe-gyin seemed to melt away into the heart of the blue mountains, the gold bulb and spire of a large pagoda glittered in splendid outline over the dark tops of the trees. The massive walls and tapering roofs of numerous monasteries spoke to the same purpose. And on, crossing over, and entering the town itself,

laid out with wide and sheltered thoroughfares, and public buildings, such as court-houses, schools, a post and telegraph office, a jail, a church, I came into contact with the pioneer efforts of a still higher civilisation.

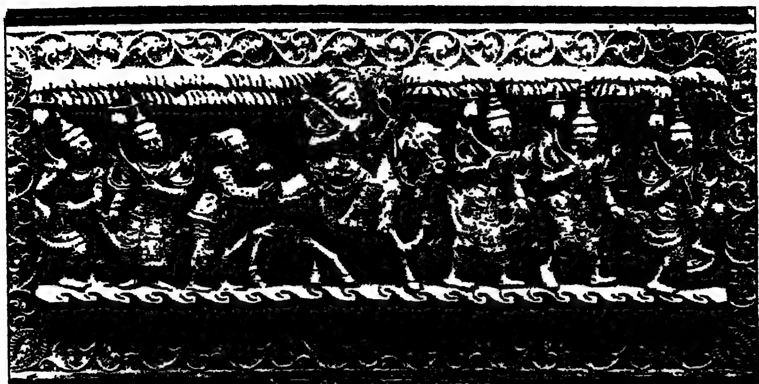
Thus it comes that a town which, to the newcomer from great centres of life, must seem small and insignificant, leaves on the mind of one emerging from the hill tracts, where civilisation still speaks only in faint whispers, an impression of dignity and importance; and it is in this character that Shwe-gyin is regarded by its people.



Book XI

THE SITTANG

SHWE-GYIN—THE SITTANG—SITTANG—THE CANAL TO PEGU



WOOD-CARVING

CHAPTER XL

SHWE-GYIN

BUT, in fact, Shwe-gyin as a town has for many years been on the decline. At the outset, when Pegu was first incorporated in the empire by Lord Dalhousie, Shooay-gheen, as it was then spelt, was not only the chief town of the district, but also a military cantonment in which troops were quartered. Of that time, although it dates back less than half a century, there is now scarcely a trace. The barracks, that were built on the laterite ridge which dominates the town, have completely disappeared. Of those who occupied them, the only surviving trace is in the cemetery—adjunct of every British settlement in the East. There you will find the graves of that period, with the

customary legends inscribed upon them: "Major ——, to whose memory this monument is erected by his brother officers, in token of their regard and esteem"; "Captain ——, who combined high intellectual gifts with great sweetness and courtesy of disposition, to whose memory this stone is inscribed by his sorrowing mother." "John, the infant son of —— and ——," who ran his brief course in an alien land, dying on the day he was born.

Like many others of its kind, it is rapidly falling into decay. The wooden gate has fallen in on its hinges; the graves are black with stress of exposure to the weather; the inscriptions on the stones are already half illegible; the interspaces are choked with weeds. The strong wall built about it still keeps the site inviolate, but desolation and abandonment are writ painfully upon all that is within.

There are some lines of Emile Souvestre in which he states the reluctance of the Breton peasantry to bury their dead in any but the immemorial churchyard of their fathers. "*Les restes de nos pères sont ici; pourquoi en séparer celui qui vient de mourir? Exilé, là bas au cimetière de la chapelle, il n'entendra ni les chants des offices, ni les prières qui rachètent les trépassés. C'est ici sa place; nous pouvons voir sa tombe de nos fenêtres; nous pouvons y envoyer nos plus petits enfants prier chaque soir; cette terre est la propriété des morts.*"

Often the memory of them has assailed me, when I have come by chance upon these lonely derelict graves of my own far-scattered race.

Since 1895 Shwe-gyin has undergone a further contraction. It has ceased to be the headquarters of the district till then administered from it. Thatôn, with its new lands rising from the sea, has taken its place; and the Sittang, to complete its abandonment, has for some years past been withdrawing its tortuous channel from the neighbourhood of Shwe-gyin. But although its importance has thus in some measure passed away, it must continue for long to be a town. Its position here at the foot of the hill country, some day to be exploited for its mineral wealth, secures its future. The fickle Sittang will perhaps one day return; roads will connect it with the sealed wilderness of the Yunzalin, and as its population grows with the duration of the Imperial peace, it will continue its history far into the future. But it is sore and aggrieved just now at its abandonment, and the tale on the lips of its people is for ever one of decaying fortunes.

Down by a dying backwater of the Sittang, the curious may still trace the site of the old Burmese stockade, precipitately abandoned when our troops first came up this way. That, and all it stands for, is fast fading into the misty tracts of the forgotten. It is a chapter that is never likely to be reopened.

CHAPTER XLI

THE SITTANG

THE Sittang, which rises at the foot of the Shan hills, in the Yaméthin plain, runs its course of three hundred and fifty miles to the sea, flanked on one side by the Pegu Yoma, and on the other by the Paung-Laung hills. Tradition ascribes to it a mysterious subterranean connection with the Nyaung-ywé lake on the Shan plateau. Its stream, which in the rainy season flows with great velocity, is practically unnavigable by steamers beyond Shwe-gyin, up to which point the great tide of the Gulf of Martaban is felt. Its most striking feature is the bore, of which I will presently give some account.

At Shwe-gyin I first embarked upon its waters, and the wide sand spaces there, between it and its tributary, the bare grey banks, devoid of forest, gave it, to my eyes, the wonted character of an Indian river. Gradually, as I travelled down it, the spaces narrowed, the river walls rose sheer, crested with giant grasses, and this impression wore away. Sand-martins twittered and made short flights before their nest-holes in the banks. Bronze-wings of exceptional size and brilliance skimmed the air after flies, and the pied kingfisher

fluttered in the sunlight, poised high above the calm face of the river. Painted butterflies winged their lowlier flight, touching its ripples, and heedless of the hungry fish that followed them, noses out of water, in tense pursuit.



ON THE PAUNG-LAUNG HILLS: HUT IN THE FOREST

At Daung-sarit low hills rose above the river on the east bank, where long lines of village huts deployed. The black nets of fishermen hung like infernal shrouds from stakes in the sun, and each roof-top was conspicuous with waterpots and fire-clappers laid upon it, in tribute to the dryness of the season. The waters of the river were yellow, and charged with silt, and

at Daung-sarit it was perhaps two hundred yards across. But gradually it widened, and trees and grasses increased.

The launch stopped at intervals to pick up and disembark passengers, who went to and fro in her sampan. I was in a country boat, enjoying the novelty of being towed. The sensation of motion without effort was attractive; there was neither creak of oar nor throb of paddle, and it felt like floating over velvet. A faint oscillation alone conveyed a hint of movement. But whenever the launch forged ahead after a pause, the boat for an instant shot forward as the hawser pulled, only to lapse once more into its state of rest. Cotton-trees, with their candelabra tracery and scarlet bloom, made their patterns against the blue. The sky was charged with electric clouds; the landscape of mountains looked pale in the mists of advancing summer; the glare of noon was oppressive to my eyes; yet there was a breeze upon the river, and travel in this country boat proved far from unpleasant.

At Myit-kyo I reached the mouth of the Pegu-Sittang canal, constructed to circumvent the bore of the Sittang. Coringhi labourers abounded here, and natives of India generally. Lock-gates shut off the canal from the river, and an avenue of acacias followed the banks of the canal. There were a few shops by the wayside, and in the distance, emerging like an island from a sea of grass, stood a monastery, typical of the Delta. After a while the Pegu launch came in; we shipped some passengers, and proceeded on our

way. Villages lined the banks and the river ever widened as we went.

At Khayo low hills again descended to the stream's edge, and behind them rose the blue bulwarks of the Paung-Laung hills, an outcrop of white rocks near their summits giving an impression of snow. But as the sun paled, they stood out clear and blue against the tinted sky. Cotton-trees and birds innumerable, plantain-groves and mangoes bursting into bloom, pagodas upon the river heights, met me as I took my way, and so I came in the late evening to Sittang.



CHAPTER XLII

SITTANG

SITTANG is built at the mouth of the Kha-wa streamlet, and consists now of a few wide roads, a bazaar, and three hundred houses. It was built by the Talaing (Mun) under We-ma-la, the prince who founded Pegu, thirteen hundred years ago. Traces of the Talaing supremacy survive in the Kyaik Ka-lun-pun pagoda, and in the ruins of the town and palace of Kyaik-ka-tha, a few miles inland. The strange name of the pagoda is connected by the people with a quaint legend of Buddha. A thousand giants, it is said, lived here in the days of the great teacher, and when he came to Sittang they grew hungry at the sight of him and resolved to eat him. But their efforts to catch him were in vain, for howsoever they pursued he was always out of their reach. At last, very weary and fatigued, they gave up the chase, and asked him how he had succeeded in escaping them. To which he replied that he had never moved at all! Then he preached the law to them, to their edification, and in their new-found zeal they built the pagoda whose name in the Talaing language is an epitome of the story.

The name Sittang, or Sit-taung, is associated by its people with the march of a general of Anawrata, King of Pagan, who paused here on his way to the conquest of Thatôn, to ask the king for more troops. The story is trifling, but it shows that the historic march of the great king on the Talaing capital has never been forgotten.

The lower base of the pagoda is of hewn laterite; its upper and newer portion is ascribed to a Burmese governor, and the flight of stairs that leads up its western face was cut by the British garrison, which appears to have used the summit as a signalling station. The view from it embraces the Sittang—or, as it is called by the people, the Paung-Laung—river, and beyond it a level plain, slightly forested, which stretches away to the low hills near Pegu. In clear weather the golden spire of the Shway Hmaw Daw Pagoda can be seen twinkling in the sun. In the west, wooded and slightly undulating country reaches away to the foot of the Kyaik-ti-yio hill, whose singular pagoda is visible from here. It is a day's journey from Sittang, or two days for slow travellers, old people, and women with small children. The pagoda festival lasts "from the full moon of Tabaung to the full moon of Tagoo," and it was to begin within four days of my visit to Sittang, on February 27th. This, in fact, is the great festival-season throughout Burma. It is a time of leisure and of plenty for the country-side; the harvest has been gathered in, and there is little work to be done till the setting in of the rains. It is a season therefore of

sight-seeing and picnicking, which in a primitive society are closely intermingled with pilgrimages and religion. Most of the commanding heights in Burma have long since been crowned with pagodas, and a visit to any of these gratifies the innate piety and gaiety of the people, besides furnishing them with the change of scene that few human beings are willing to do without. Changes have been at work at Sittang, as elsewhere, during the half-century that it has been a British possession. Troops were once quartered here, and in fact Sittang was not taken without the loss of many British lives. Relics of this period survive in a ditch that marks the site of the old barracks, and in a small whitewashed cemetery that overlooks the river.

The river too has been changing greatly. Thirty years ago the great bore of the Sittang was a familiar object to every inhabitant of the village. The village headman, aged sixty-three, has lively recollections of it, when in his youth it brought its spoil of dead fish and prawns to his door, and the old abbot of the monastery on the hill has often heard its incoming roar. But its voice is no longer heard in the village, and its wall of waters rushing in with tumult is no longer a familiar sight. Its limit now is the village of Khaya-soo.

The bore is caused by the union of two portions of the great tidal wave of the Indian Ocean, which here rushes up the funnel-shaped mouth of the Sittang at a speed of twelve miles an hour. Its contact with the descending waters of the river causes a deposition of silt, and the formation of the new lands, which are

so marked a feature of this coast. It rises at the mouth of the river to a height of twenty feet.

Cæsar Frederick, the Venetian, who visited Burma in 1567, has left an animated account of his journey from Martaban to Pegu, and of the bore of the Sittang.

"From Martaban," he says, "I departed to go to the chiefest Citie in the Kingdome of Pegu, which is also called after the name of the Kingdome, which voyage is made by sea in three or foure dayes. They may goe also by land, but hee that hath merchandize it is better for him to goe by sea and lesser charge, and in this voyage you shall have a Marcareo which is one of the marvellous things in the world ye Nature hath wrought, and I never sawe anie thing so hard to be beleeved as this. The great encreasing and deminishing that the water maketh there at one pushe or instant, and with the horrible earthquake and great noyse that it maketh where it cometh. Wee departed from Martaban in barks, which are like to our Pylot boates with the encrease of the Water, and they goe as swift as an arrowe out of a bowe, so long as the tide runneth with them, and when the water is at the highest, then they draw themselves out of the Chanel towards some bancke, and there they come to anker and when the water is diminished, then they rest a drye; and when the barkes rest drie, they are as high from the bottome of the Chanell as any house toppe is high from the ground. They let their barks lie so high for this respect, that if there should any shippe rest or ride in the Chanell, with such force commeth

in the water, that it would overthrowe ship or barke; yet for all this, that the barkes bee so farre out of the Chanell, and though the water hath lost her greatest strength and furie before it come so high, yet they make fast their prowe to the strane, and often times it maketh them verie fearefull and if the Anker did not hold her prow up by strength she woulde bee overthrowne and lost with men and goods, when the water beginneth to encrease, it maketh such a noise and so great that you would think it an earthquake, and presently at the first it maketh three waves. So that the first washeth over the barke, from stem to stern, the second is not so furious as the first, and the third raiseth the anker, and then for the space of six houres yet the water encreaseth, they rowe with such swiftness than you woulde thinke they did flye in these tides there must be lost no jot of time, for if you arrive not at the stagions before the tide be spent, you must turne backe from whence you came.

"I coulde never," he gravely adds, "gather any reason of the noyse that this water maketh in the encrease of the tide, and in diminishing of the water."

As one travels of a quiet evening down the Sittang, one's fancy drifts back to these scenes of the past; to the days of the pagoda builders, to the great march of Anawrata the king, to the coming of the Portuguese who fought upon all these sites, and so to the camp on the hill, and the Englishmen of a bygone generation. Many ot them must often have found pleasure in

drifting down the river, as one is prone to do now, after the day's work is done.

Save for the coming of the Coringhi fisherman on the river, the Coringhi coolie in the village, and the Chinaman, who trades in liquor and opium and European goods, our own presence here for half a century has made little apparent change. The people go about their avocations much as they do in Upper Burma, the village headman still wears silk, and has not forgotten his manners; nor the village girl her native independence.

And yet, what change has come, is ominous, for half a century's growth. The fish in the river a Coringhi perquisite, the steam launch that navigates its waters owned by a Surati, the sampans driven by Chittagonian Musulmans, the larger trade in the hands of the Chinaman—I wonder what it will come to in the end! I hope that it will not finally oust the people of the soil; for the world will be poorer for the passing of the Burmese race.



CHAPTER XLIII

THE CANAL TO PEGU

AT seven o'clock in the morning, all at Sittang who mean to travel are awaiting the coming of the steamer, which sends its voice like that of a chapel harmonium up the river reaches, but itself keeps industriously out of sight. The river is laden with white mists, which creep off its face, and tend with the morning wind down-stream, rising as they go, till they grow into fog-banks and pass away. It is cold at this hour, even in the last days of February, and the women cover themselves with shawls, and the men with blankets. The smallest children face the chill air in nakedness, which either kills them off, or fits them better for the struggle of life. The fittest only survive; a circumstance which accounts in part for the fine physique of the race.

Every one waits with Eastern patience for the steamer's coming. A little way apart from the crowd, two Chinamen, in trade, squat by the water's edge, cheerful but exclusive. A monk in yellow robes, lit by the rising sun, waits a few paces off, accompanied by a layman who carries his begging bowl, and

stoops respectfully before him. A party of women, with coils of neat hair upon their heads, and pink *pawas* thrown round their necks, smoke placidly together, discussing their neighbours. A native of Northern India plies a brisk trade amongst the assembled company. He is a seller of tea and hot cakes, which he carries slung at opposite ends of a swinging pole. It is a long call from his home on the shores of the Ganges to this little town on the Sittang.

At last, after an hour's trumpeting in the stillness of the morning, the steamer throbs up, passengers get under weigh, there is a bustle in the placid crowd, and the old Thugyi—the Headman of Sittang—bluff, hearty and courteous to the last, *shekoes*, as my dugout takes the water.

We steam up the Sittang as far as Myit-kyo, where the acacia avenue along the canal banks makes as prominent a feature in the landscape as its kindred at Ismailia, and there I change into the launch that is to take me to Pegu. The banks of the canal are high at first, and its waters stretch away between them, laden with green scum and water cabbages, which drift helplessly to and fro, driven by the angry wash of the launch.

As we advance the avenue dies away, the banks dwindle down, and the canal becomes wider. A stream enters it on the north, and a village and boats at anchor mark the junction. But for some time the journey becomes uninteresting and the banks devoid of beauty.

Nearer Pegu the interest grows. Villages and monasteries line the banks, passengers embark and disembark, cocoanut palms and groups of trees break



WAITING FOR THE STEAMER

the monotony of the level rice-lands; signs of the harvest greet one on every hand; the yellow grain lies piled in great pyramids before the houses; and boat after boat, with carved stern and bellying sail, sweeps by.

The telegraph wire hums by the banks, and at long intervals there are houses built for the canal officers, which recall the little *gares* of the Suez Canal. It is with this on the whole that I compare the Pegu-Sittang Canal at this season; yet the country through which it passes is one of the richest in the world, and its very monotony is due to its richness, since it has all been levelled for the cultivation of rice.

The company assembled on board provides material for entertainment, and this is as well, since discomfort is the keynote of the only accommodation the steamer offers. Out of the crowd of Burmese and Indian faces, there is notably one that stands out in a kind of majestic supremacy. It is the face of a Bussorah Arab; a face in which race and blood are writ clear. Beside it, the flat mongoloid features of the Burmese men and women look plebeian and unfinished; those of the Madrasis, brutish; of the Chittagonians and Suratis, weak and effeminate. The man looks like a king fallen upon evil times. He wears a saffron cloth over his head, like a *burnous*, and it frames his clear grave features, his pointed grizzled beard, his straight-cut nose, and his forehead graven with lines. He can talk no language but his own, and he sits here isolated, a continent apart from the crowd about him, telling his beads, while his lips murmur the name of the Prophet. What mission I wonder has brought him here?

As the poles to him, heavy of paunch, naked, the loud vulgarian, is the Chetti. The face of the

man is carnal, half of it mouth and jaw. There are a number of Madrasis and Coringhis, black-skinned and aboriginal in type. One of them is a woman with much of the physical beauty of her race; but she is scarcely one degree removed from the savage, her nose pierced with jewellery and her ears distorted by its weight out of all human semblance. The steamer clerk is a Surati, of anæmic appearance and rude hectoring manner; the *serang* and crew are sleek Chittagonians with oiled hair and beards. There are Chinamen in black calico and soft felt hats, who sit in a group by themselves and smoke cigarettes, and there is a crowd of Burmese passengers. These good people neither jabber gutturally like the Madrasis, nor hector like the steamer clerk, nor go naked like the Chetti. Most of them carry umbrellas and wear silk; the old men are calm and dignified; the young men humorous and genial; the women are self-possessed, and on this occasion preoccupied with babies, one of whom is a jovial character about half a year old, with black eyes, intelligent but fathomless, and a skin that is almost white.

And thus, in the midst of this motley company, I come to the end of my water journey, at a village some six miles distant from Pegu. At this season the launch can go no farther. From here a straight road cleaves its way through the level rice-fields, and past a wide mere in which black buffaloes wallow, and wild duck find a home. It brings me in the late evening to Pegu, boring its dusty way through the ruined walls of the

ancient city. And here, where of old great armies went forth, and kings upon their litters, a few tired people enter now, unquestioned.



Book XII

RUBIES

THABEIT-KYIN—ON THE ROAD—CAPELAN—MOGÔK—L'ENVOI

CHAPTER XLIV

THABEIT-KYIN

THE grey mists of the morning were slowly creeping off the face of the river, where it lay in a fold of the hills, and the steamer was beginning to throb with angry life. The captain's voice, still husky with sleep, rose above the din of the anchor chains, and there was small space in which to step with my servants and baggage ashore. It was thus that I found myself at half-past six one morning, two days before Christmas, on the steep left bank of the Irrawaddy at Thabeit-kyin. On the slope of the hills, and farther south on the low foreshore, clustered the village houses, the post and telegraph office, the barracks of the military police, and the Government rest-house. Few of the inhabitants were yet astir.

In the white mist the forms of Panthay muleteers, the nozzling heads of the mules, were faintly visible. On a great pile of flour-sacks, lay two policemen asleep; the one a Sikh from the Punjab, the other a Gurkha from Nepaul. They lay here guarding Her Majesty's stores, on a spot that in the flood season is buried under water deep enough to float a man-of-war. As I stood beside them and looked down on the silent and

seemingly motionless river, the grey mists rolling away in successive folds gradually turned to cloud, and as they climbed skywards, touched by the early rays of the sun, passed into phantoms of the rarest beauty. Everywhere the morning was now breaking, and from my vantage-ground I could trace the climbing light on the



ON THE ROAD

face of the opposite hills. The steamer was fast disappearing at the end of a long grey reach of the river, and I turned with a feeling of some loneliness—for it is a lonely place—to the prospect of a stay at Thabeit-kyin

To-day, after five years, I am here again under wholly different conditions. It is the eve of the monsoons and the season is charged with the sense of great



THABEIT-KYIN

transformations. Luminous clouds climb in fantastic forms up the ladders of heaven, and all day long their pageantry fills the eye. Purple banks and curtains in lone corners of the horizon speak of the gathering rain, and at evening, great, shadowy, drifting forms, grey, purple, and ink-black, sweep over the world.

The summer is over. And yet, such is the strange medley of the seasons here, spring, laughing and youthful, is everywhere abroad; in the green, delicate, tracery of great trees, in the cherry-like bloom and laburnum-gold of acacias; in the purple clusters of the *pinma*, soon to be shaken from their boughs by torrents of driving rain.

But on the hill-slopes all is withered and barren. Each shrub and tree stands clear of its neighbour, every leaf of the underworld is dead. If some forest creature, a deer or a panther, were to start up from the river's edge, one could trace every movement of it against the hillside, as it bore upwards through the skeleton maze of trunks. A month hence, the jungle will be all but impenetrable. And there is colour in all this, and such variety as goes to the making of landscapes; green little valleys, ruddy brown hills, a river of purple silk, and cloud shadows alternating with the light on peaks, and slopes, and wooded lanes of water.

Thabeit-kyin is the port of Mogôk, capital of the ruby mines district, and this circumstance gives it its character. At this little village all the mining machinery, the electric plant, the batteries and engines of the company, have been landed. Through this


PANTHAY MULETEER

little postern gate, the wealth of Capelan has passed for centuries on its way to the great world; to the treasuries of kings, to the fingers of princes, to the necks of beautiful women; to the making of one, the undoing of another. Yet of all this there is little trace in the sleepy lineaments of Thabeitkyin. The red stream of wealth has left it a quiet village. Three or four times a week, the steamers call here; every morning at this season small caravans of pack mules set out for the ruby mines, and every day at noon, or evening, long lines of weary mules file in to this the last stage of their journey. Bullock carts and buffalo carriages creak and toil along the road. But there is no trace anywhere of abounding life or vigour. No one

hurries here but the newcomer; and a day's delay in effecting a start for the mines, or the waste of a forenoon in adjusting the load of a single mule, are regarded with mild complacency by the *habitués* of the place. The village headman, in pink silk, sits on his hams in the shade, and looks gravely on, the caretaker of the rest-house ambles to and fro in his loin-cloth, interjecting philosophic remarks, the caravan-man pulls a cord, mumbles in a strange Celestial *patois*, and makes prolonged journeys between the waiting baggage and his shed in the little hollow by the landing-place Sixty miles from here there are rubies, *the finest rubies in the world*; but at Thabeit-kyin all is indolence and peace.

Remote as the place is, strange people drift here from far corners of the world. Beech-combers and adventurers; Australians, who have failed on Thursday Island; discharged soldiers, who have fought over half the empire, or say they have; voluble half-castes, with restless eyes. They drift here drawn by the spell of the ruby, and are undeterred by the company's type-written warnings in all the rest-houses on the way to the mines, that "by going to Mogôk, they are undertaking a tiresome journey to no purpose."

CHAPTER XLV

ON THE ROAD

SIXTY-ONE miles of cart-road cover the distance from the river to the mines. They say a motor-car is on its way from Europe, and that when it comes the favoured traveller will rush across in a day. I wonder what the placid cattle, the stout little ponies, and the nervous mules, as they come tinkling down the hillside, will think of their new competitor; but, for my part, I prefer the leisurely ride on horseback, up the cobbled bridle-paths, over the level rice-fields, and through the bamboo aisles of the forest. There are houses by the way, well equipped for the European traveller; villages and outposts; and great company for one who cares for it. There are Panthay mule men, packmen from the Shan hills, bullock-carters, and armed men in the service of the King. There are long convoys of rationing mules and ponies, with the comfortable air that distinguishes all Government animals from the lean and ragged beasts of the Panthay caravans. There is a painted gig being carried up on a bullock-cart for a successful ruby-trader; a smart led pony equipped with an English saddle, in the care of

a Musulman groom; there are carved and gilded poles, and mosaic Buddhas, and many articles of monastic decoration; all the outcome of some one's success in the gamble of life at Mogôk.

It is a life fraught with vicissitudes, and the pious builder of a gilded monastery, the late owner of a big



PANTHAY MULETEER EN ROUTE TO THE RUBY MINES

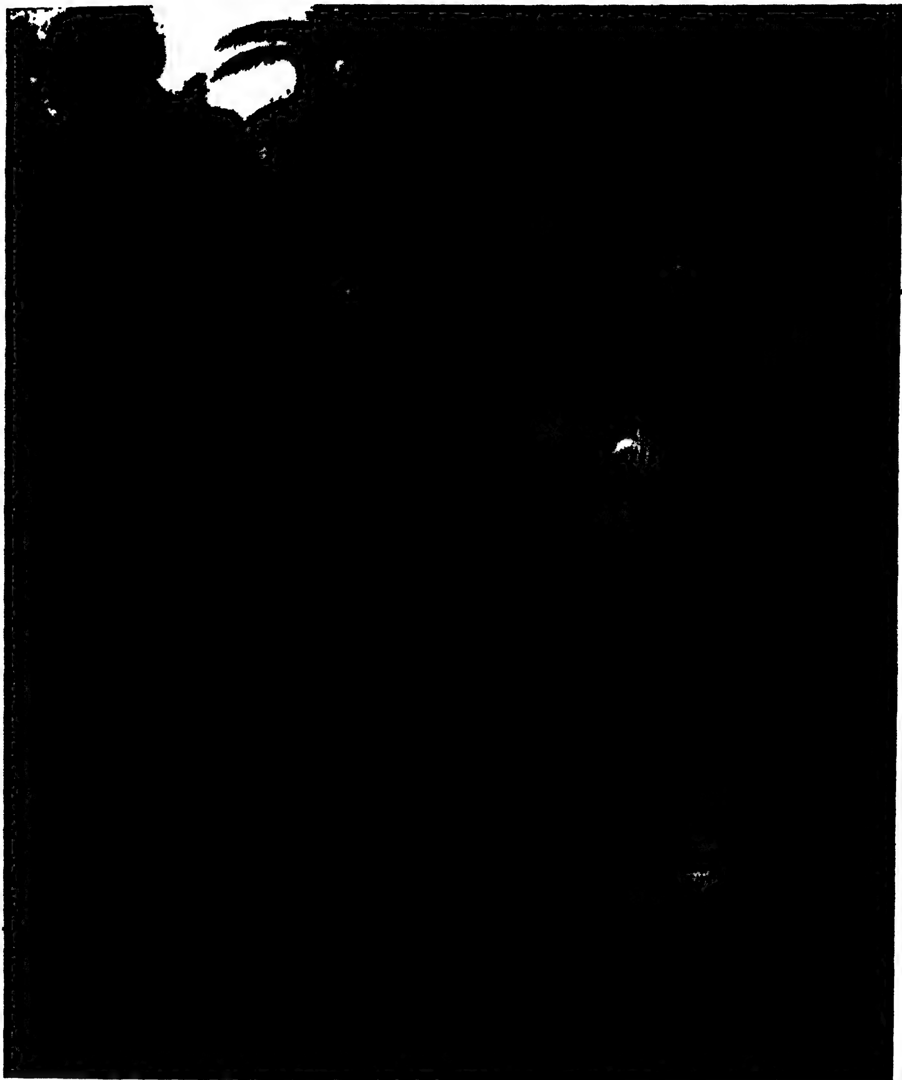
house at Kyatpyin, is to-day the philosophic driver of a bullock-cart. Fortune has turned her back upon him; but she cannot conceal the merit he has won by his piety, and cart-driver though he has become, he still remains Kyaung-taga U Saw, "Venerable-Builder-of-a-Monastery" Saw; and herein dwells the wisdom of the innocents.

Wapyi-daung, ten and a half miles from the river, is



THE STAGE AT WAPYI-DAUNG

a little village in a stockade, and its only street is the highway, which enters it at one gate and leaves it at the other. Kyauklebin, the next halting-place, is six miles farther on, It is a hamlet by the highway, where the latter descends to cross by a black bridge over a stream. Facing the rest-house is a military outpost, enclosed within a ditch and wall. At the gate a sentry, with bayonet fixed, walks to and fro through the twenty-four hours, and through it, over the narrow drawbridge, enter the long trains of rationing mules, the armed men afoot between Mogôk and the river, and the elephants laden with military stores. The great swaying beasts, as they enter, dwarf the little houses of the post, and I wonder in how many minutes they could trample down the whole interior of wood



From a painting by J. R. Middleton.

A VOTIVE OFFERING.

and thatch. In a little while the Sikh commandant calls, in his sword and sash, to pay his civilities, and to say that all is well at the post. The day drifts slowly on to afternoon. The village cocks crow to each other; a traveller passes down the road; hard by in the little stream under the black bridge, ducks cackle and dive in the shallows, and the village girls laugh as they bathe, and fill their waterpots for the day's use. Great trees fling their shadows over the stream, and through the foliage there are visible the spires of a monastery, the brown roofs of cottages. The picture is one of rustic beauty, that lingers in the recollection long after one has left the country.



COFFEE-HOUSING

The road from Kyauklebin ascends continually, till it attains the summit of a pass, from which there is visible the great outline of the Shwé-u-Daung, its

precipices and ruddy downs fringed by dark woods. The country here is of a titanic order, and an impression of sombre grandeur pervades it at this season.

At Shwe-Nyaung-Bin there is another outpost, which stands on the crest of a conical hill, set in the midst of an amphitheatre of mountains. It is good in the heart of this wilderness, in the gathering dusk, to hear the quick enlivening peal of the bugles of England. There is no British soldier nearer than Shwebo, sixty miles away, but there is much in a great tradition. From Shwe-Nyaung-Bin, the road descends to the river of Kin. Dark peaks here rise up into the clouds as if from the bowels of the valley. One of these, darker and more rugged than the rest, is surmounted by a pagoda in ruins. In the valley bottom there are rice-fields, and by the edge



PACKMEN CROSSING AT KIN



HKABINE

of the little river, red with silt, slumbers the village of Kin. Under the jack-trees, on the river's fringe, sit through the noon the blue-coated muleteers, and all day long packmen cross and recross the little stream. Kin was of old notorious for its dacoits, and many a traveller bound for Mandalay with jewels for the court has been waylaid and killed in its neighbourhood. Of a later period of lawlessness, there is record in a stone by the wayside raised to the "Memory of Jemadar-Adjutant Devi Sahai Misr and Sepoy Javala Singh, of the Ruby Mines Military Police Battalion, who fell in action with dacoits near this spot on December 18th, 1889."

From Hkabine on to Capelan is a matter of ten miles by the cart-road. The cobbled mule-track is

shorter. The clouds gather in great masses overhead, and thunder is abroad. Showers of rain fall ; but under the sweeping curtains of cloud, views of the greatest calibre expand to the distant horizon. Reaching its summit, the road drops gently into the little valley which for four centuries was vaguely known to Europe as Capelan.



CHAPTER XLVI

CAPELAN

THE village of Kyatpyin, from which the name Capelan appears to have sprung, lies in the centre of the valley, at an elevation of 4,400 feet above the sea. Although it never snows in these regions, the cold, even in the valley, is apt to be acute in winter. It is never very hot, and the character of the climate is testified to by the rosy cheeks and fresh complexions of the children of the English at Kyatpyin. The village clusters about the roadside, and gathers much charm from the hollyhocks and roses which blossom about most of the houses, and from the flights of white and dark pagodas which decorate the knolls and eminences about it. The valley is green and meadow-clad; and in the rains, when the waters accumulate, it recovers part of its old-time character of a lake. The Père Giuseppe d'Amato, the first European to visit the mines (about 1833), observes of it that "the soil is uneven and full of marshes, which form seventeen small lakes, each having a particular name. And it is this soil," he says, "which is so rich in mineral treasures."

But the chief glory of Kyatpyin resides in the beautiful mountains which encircle it. The most

notable of these, the Chinthé Taung, or Lion Hill, is seven thousand feet in height. No effort of art could achieve a more exquisite tapestry of red heather and rounded slopes, defined by deep green woods along the water-courses, than is here presented by it to the eye. Its beauty is vivified by the constant play of light and



A MONASTERY OF THE HILLS

shadow on it, as the clouds travel overhead. Another conspicuous landmark is the Pingu-Taung, a conical hill, which holds aloft against the sky a small pagoda. This hill has long enjoyed the reputation of great riches, and baskets of earth have been taken from it of which the half have been rubies. The ruby mines company has been less fortunate; and it was here in the effort



CAPELAN

to wrest from the Pingu-Taung its store of rubies, that it wasted a great portion of its capital. Ten years ago Kyatpyin was the centre of the company's efforts ; but the tide of enterprise has moved on to the neighbouring valley of Mogôk, and Kyatpyin is now all but deserted.



CHAPTER XLVII

MOGÔK

(i) THE TOWN

AS I look out of my window on the night of my arrival at Mogôk, I see before me, spread out in the valley bottom, the town of rubies, mist-clad, pricked with fire; and out of the mist, effulgent, the great electric arcs of the company, in scattered *échelon*, blaze like sapphires. The Alpine forms of mountains rise up in vague outline above the valley. The rain-cleared sky is lit with a galaxy of stars. A silence as of death lies over the town, where every human emotion is afoot. The miner suddenly grown rich, the gambler poised between the strokes of fate, the sorter dreaming of his England, the tired digger, the easy beauty—all of these lie here buried in the mist. It is a curious spectacle, with nothing in it of the East; northern, rather, with its blue mists and its peaks strung like supernatural battlements against the stars.

In the morning, when I wake and open my window to look again on the spectacle, I see a grey sky stamped with a settled melancholy; a sky that means, it would seem, neither to cry nor to smile; and down in the

valley the town of rubies, clothed in and roofed over with grey iron, in a veil of mist. All about it are the peaked mountains, pale and unreal at their summits, green at their thresholds.

It is the day of the big bazaar, and the market-place is astir, and quick with traffic. Along the yellow road, all hammered matrix of rubies, sit the market-women, with great hats on their heads, and the produce of their gardens spread before them. Fruits and vege-



THE MARKET-WOMEN

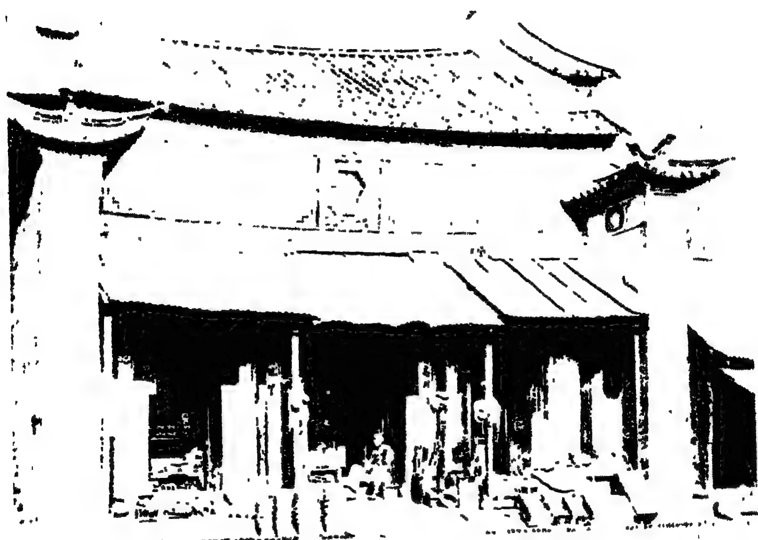
tables abound. Here are small tomatoes done up in little cane cylinders, through the pattern of which the red fruit glints, baskets of scarlet raspberries, piles of flowers, and a variety of strange products, from mushrooms to bamboo-roots. Down these lanes the crowd sways, laughing, talking, bargaining, while the sun streams down on the gay colours of their clothes. It is the East, the indubitable East; but clean, neat, and prosperous; the Far Silken East of the little-known peoples. Of those who come and go, some are clad in blue and red, in breast-cloth, coat, stomacher, and leggings; with crescent silver neck-


THE IRON TOWN

lets, big again as the moon, about their throats. Some are of the Shan, flat of nose —'tis the failing of these people—fair of skin, with even a rosy flush in their cheeks, plump, waddling, comely, and comfortable. All are over-topped by the great hat, symbol of the Far East. Here and there in the crowd is a Burmese damsel, in silk, velvet, pearls, and a yellow translucent parasol, the comforter of some ruby king or European adventurer.

Towering above the line of slight houses, is the keep of a prosperous trader, all of stone, very high; and from its mid-story protrudes the head of a retainer,

pipe in mouth, his slit eyes restless, absorbing. At the window of a house in the main street, barred like a leopard's cage, sit groups of Chetti, naked and intent, sorting the rubies which lie in gleaming trays on their knees. In a hut at a corner, where the stream of yellow tailings runs by, a tanner from Oudh sits at



A CHINAMAN'S STORE

work on the leopard-skins of a miner. A countryman of his across the way rolls cigarettes by the hour, selling them to the passers-by. At intervals there are Chinese eating-houses, equipped with little tables and stools, and dressers fitted out with blue china, and chopsticks, and pewter spoons. The fare is varied and savoury, and pigs' trotters, plump fowls, cabbages, and ducks hang from strings like a curtain, behind which the

cook, bland, indefatigable, plies his calling, a Ciro *in partibus*. Of a morning these houses fill with motley crowds of Burmans, Shan, Panthay, Meingtha, Paloung, and Lishaw, who crowd round the little tables, and feed in groups, bowl to chin, their feet perched high on the narrow stools. It is a replica, with the difference of place and people and ways, of the scenes that characterise any French or Italian town between the blessed hours of the midday meal. The company is jovial, and loud hoarse laughter peals from the crowded interiors out into the sunlit road. Blue is the prevailing colour, from the pale hue of the Chinaman's much-washed coat to the dark indigo of the Meingtha woman's lofty turban.


IN THE STREETS

It is a great tide of life that sweeps in here on these fifth days of the year. The people of the hills begin to come in on the previous evening and nearly all of those who have to come a long way

sleep over-night at Mogôk, so that the day of prelude to the bigger day, has a name to itself—Zay-beit-nay—"The Eve of Market Day." The permanent shops are kept open all through the week; the shops of the haberdashers and the tinmen, of the sellers of Gautamas and *htis*, of gold leaf and parasols, and the booths of the little pedlars. At one end, in a quiet side street, is a long range of tea-shops, where green and pickled tea is sold in the dusky interiors by Shan and Paloung. Lastly, there is the covered bazaar. The shimmer of a hundred delicate colours of silk, the coming and going—the *va-et-vient*—of many races in the half-lit interior, while the sun blazes without, make of it a spectacle for the most fastidious eye.

(ii) THE STRANGE WORLD OF THE DIGGER

Following on by the roadside, runs swiftly a stream, yellow as any Tiber. A few yards and I step into the strange world of the digger. Picture a soil, yellow and scarred with countless pits, honeycombed like a burrow; and at each pit's mouth, a rubbish heap. Overhead, an intricate array of bamboos, like the tracery of dahabeahs at the Kasr-el-nil, and in the background blue mountains, alpinous, shimmering in the sun like steel. Set in this *mise-en-scène* are the miners: people in blue clothes and yellow parasol-like hats; people in loose trousers, showing legs tattoed with the figures of tigers and dragons; a people lithe of limb, small of stature, with muscles of iron. The process of mining

is stupefying in its simplicity. There is a straight bamboo twenty feet high stuck like a mast in the yellow soil. Near its top, through a slit, works another horizontally; at one end of it, a make-weight, a basket filled with mud or stones, at the other a long cane

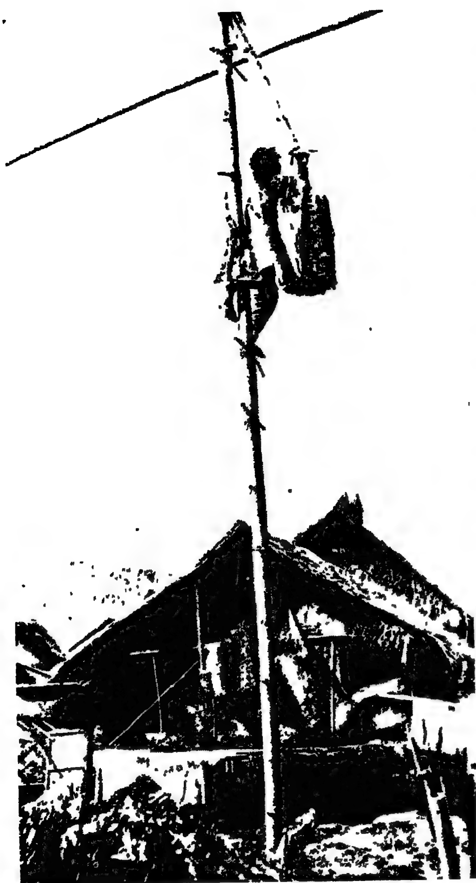


"KHANÉZIMAS"

reaching down like the line of a fisherman; last of all a bucket to hold water or mud, as the case may be If it be water, your miner stands at the little pit's mouth, lowers the bucket, lets it fill and come up again, the cane slipping through his fingers, and on its emerging, tilts the water from it into a channel, down which it runs yellow and turbid to swell the stream by the



INDIGENOUS MINING



FILLING THE BASKET WITH STONES

roadside. If mud, the digger in the pit fills it with a spade and lets it run up to the man overhead, who empties it with a jerk of his wrist on to an adjoining mud-heap. When this heap has grown big enough it is washed, and the rubies survive.

At a corner, in the dazzling sun, a small child stoops, scraping the yellow earth from a dry heap into a shallow basket. A child at play it would seem. But when the little basket is laden, she carries it away to where a woman is at work—a comely woman, in a dark blue kilt, close to her figure as she sits, a pale yellow coat, and pink silk bound about her coils of black hair. Her wide sleeves lift as she works, revealing her slender arms. And her business in life—so much at least as she

transacts here—is to let the yellow stream run through each basket of earth, till all the concealing clay is washed away and pebbles alone survive; from this remnant to pick out with precision rubies, which she slips under her tongue till her mouth is full. The occupation has its merits.

All about, under the bamboo houses and across the plain, making pools and puddles, run in bewildering variety the little streams of yellow mud.

Such is ruby-mining in its indigenous simplicity. A short way off, the company is at work, and the débris and offal of its energy are like the output of



WASHING

a mud volcano. But of the company another time. Let us turn back and consider a part of the bazaar that is without a double in the world.

(iii) THE RUBY BAZAAR

In a very little space off the main street, and scarcely



THE PUMP

wider than a cottage kitchen garden, there is gathered a dense throng of wide-hatted men. Their wide hats are clustered so close together, like minnows round a bait, that you are stricken with curiosity to know what they are about. You crush into the crowd, and find yourself in the midst of the buyers and sellers of rubies.

In the centre of each group there is a shining brass tray on a stool, and it looks when you can see it like a disc of beaten gold in the sun. By it sits the buyer.

ringed by satellites, each of whom believes himself an expert. Then there is a swaying in the crowd, and a miner edges in, picturesque in wide trousers and great flapping hat, and subsides by the tray on his haunches. There is a little cloth bag in his hands, tied very tightly round the neck with string. Slowly he unwinds the string, and the masked eyes of the buyer glitter. No word is spoken. The seller is in no hurry. When at last the long string has been unwound, and the hand clasping the little globe of cloth relaxes its amatory grip, the mouth of the bag is turned down, and from its interior there flows into the tray the red stream of stones.



WATER

Then the buyer moves. His long, delicate, nervous, fingers reach out swiftly, and in an



HAULING

instant the little pyramid is spread over the shining disc, each stone blinking in the light. For the next few seconds, all is an eloquent pantomime of fingers. The good and the bad stones are unerringly separated from each other, and formed into two little piles; the bad being pushed back to the seller's end of the tray, the good brought instinctively a little closer to the buyer. At this stage discussion supervenes. All the critics have their say; the seller waxes eloquent, the buyer cold and deprecatory. Thus the duel proceeds.

There is a score of these trays, like suns, in the close cluster of men. And that is nearly all there is to tell. Like all that is truly Eastern, the process is

simple in its character, almost limitless in its fascination. One can describe in a minute what one can look upon with unflagging interest for hours.

Considering the men, it will be seen that, of the buyers, many are foreigners. Here is one, scant of clothing, heavy of paunch, shaven as to his head—a



THE CONNOISSEUR

Chetti. He is backed by a hundred thousand pounds of capital. A yard away is a little man who talks English mellifluously. He is the son of a local Crœsus, whose house, carved and wrought in stone, overlooks the market-place. Father and son are Hindus of Amritsar, small-headed, mean-looking, insignificant of figure, as you would think they were of brain. There



U HMAT, THE RUBY KING

is little in the circuit of their own small occupation you could teach them. While the son is hidden here in the throng of miners, his father sits, clad in an English shooting-coat, behind the iron-barred doorway of his house, a tray of purchased rubies on his knees. A few years ago, he came here a poor man. Money adhered to his fingers. In a little while he began to lend it at usurious interest, on the security of gold and rubies. Then he took to the ruby trade; and now he exports his rubies to London, to Paris, and to Delhi, this fishy little man, with the face of a rat, and fathomless eyes. His house reveals his character. Its forefront bears ostentatious testimony to his wealth. Its dark interior, its bolted trap-doors, and narrow tortuous stairs, exhibit the quality of his mind; and the stone walls, and the iron bars, strong as those of a tiger's cage, speak plainly of his caution, his cowardice, his rooted doubt in the stability of any power. Yet withal a polite man, with a manner that verges on the obsequious. He is one of the most regular and considerable of the company's local customers, and if you were to see his son walk into the agent's office to buy a thousand pounds' worth of rubies, you would probably take him for a lamplighter. But there is great store of insolence in his heart, to be used on occasion.

Another great trader in Mogôk is U Hmat, "the ruby king." The title is a little fanciful perhaps, but U Hmat was great here in the days before any Englishman had come within sight of Mogôk. He is not a foreigner like the big Chetti and the little man from

Amritsar; but a native of the soil. He lives some distance from the market-place in a rambling wooden house on piles, surrounded by limes and pomegranates. At one end he has built himself a strong-room of brick, in which lie hidden, according to popular tradition, rubies of extraordinary value. U Hmat is seldom seen



RUBY-CUTTERS

abroad. He goes, it is said, in terror of his life; and his courtyard is thronged with retainers, who make for him a kind of personal bodyguard. But in bygone days he travelled every year to Mandalay with a present of rubies, and was received in audience by the king. He is the builder of many monasteries and pagodas; but is said to be less lavish in this respect than most of his compatriots in Burma. He is believed accordingly

by his European neighbours to have "his head screwed on the right way." His character for economy is the topic of very favourable discussion at the little dinner-tables of the settlement, and it is a commonplace of opinion that he is the only Burman at the mines who is not a fool. Let it be added that he is the father of a pretty daughter, whose jewels are the despair of every other woman in Mogôk, and that he keeps her in strict seclusion, lest some adventurous youth should steal away her heart, or her person, or both. He has been good enough, however, to show me some of her most beautiful jewels.

All about the market-place, in the little streets which ray out from it in the direction of the mines, the ruby-cutters toil. Each man sits before a slab of grey stone, with a pile of little sticks a few inches long beside him. In the head of each of these a ruby is embedded in hard black paste, and the cutter, taking it up, rubs the face of the ruby slowly up and down on the surface of the grindstone, till the attrition wears away a facet. A wheel and pedal supplement the process in some of the larger shops; but the method is the same. Of these cutters there are at least fifty in the town. The outcome of their labours is a little rough.

Near the pits where the diggers are at work is the ruby mart proper, which is open all the week. The long, open sheds, with their low earthen floors and thatched roofs, stand in the very midst of the turmoil of the mining. The yellow stream of tailings flows by the trays of the ruby-dealers, and the unceasing

swing of the bamboo levers makes a restless rhythm against the sky. Here, every morning of the year, a hundred brass trays clink to the musical fall of the precious stones, and the big-hatted men sit in long avenues under the pent thatch. There is scarcely any noise, for all the bargaining is made by the play



HIGH STREET OF MOGÔK

of fingers under cloth. No self-respecting dealer will ever name the price of a ruby, and the Englishman's blunt question, "What is the price of this?" brings stupefaction to the faces of all present. By each group there sits a *pwéza* or broker, whose business it is to advise and negotiate a sale. He acts as a kind of arbitrator, and as a break on excessive demands. He knows a little about the quality and local value



A LANE IN MOGÔK

of stones, and is reasonably honest. I have said there is little noise, for few words are spoken. There is less haste. You would think these good people had a thousand years in which to buy and sell.

(iv) THE COMPANY

Little as the company may seem to shareholders in England, and to many who live in their sheltered parishes, in the shadow of old-world steeples, never having heard, it may be, of this little fraction of their mighty empire, the company *in situ*, in the valley of Mogôk, is something of a power. It stands in a measure for the supremacy of the white man; for the colossus of capital; for the State. The company's agent is a potentate in his own right. Elsewhere, in nearly every other district of the province, there is only one great man, only one big house, only one repository of power. But at Mogôk there are two; the head of the district and the company's agent. And there are some who would like to see an extension of the company's authority. One morning, as I rode over the mines with one of its officers, a fearless elemental kind of man, he propounded to me a scheme for the rearrangement of matters at Mogôk. There should be, he said, a great fence made about the company's territories, and within this fence the company should be supreme. No one else should have a word to say in the matter. "Do you think, now," he continued, "that Coolgardie, Kimberley, or Klondyke could be

run on the lines of these ruby mines? No, sir! they manage their own affairs, with no Government of India to interfere with them."

A quaint vision, as of a self-willed and imperious dame, drifted across my eyes, and made me smile in the face of my downright companion. "My dear sir," I said, "there will never be a Coolgardie, or a Kimberley, or a Klondyke in the Indian Empire, and I am afraid you will not get that fence."

Nevertheless, the company to all the little people of the valley is a power; and not the less so, because it is mysteriously linked with the State, which in all ages here has been the king, the fountain of all force.

Of the company's history a little may here be told. It began with immense expectations and great hopes. The rubies that for generations had shed a lustre over the court of Ava seized the imaginations of investors in Mark Lane. The application of scientific methods to the working of mines that had for centuries been famous would, it was readily believed, increase their output enormously. The shrewd estimate of Tavernier might have occasioned some pause in these lively expectations; but Tavernier lived in the days of James I., and in the days of James I. there were neither steam-engines nor drills; and, in short, a new era had dawned, and those who were early afoot would profit by their timeliness a hundred-fold. Accordingly the shares of the new company were boomed, and there was competition to possess them. Nor was the company itself less sanguine. A price of four hundred



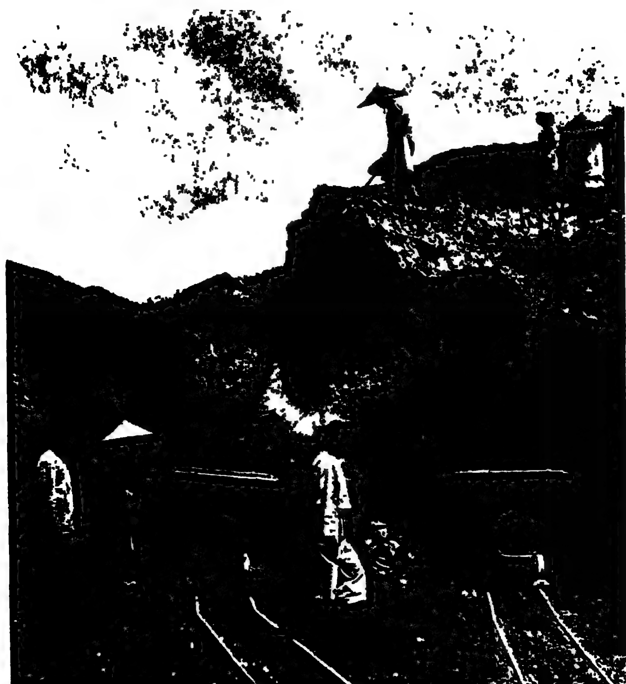
THE FLOOD OF THE TAILINGS

thousand rupees a year was to be paid by it to the Government of India for the privilege of working the mines. The company's agent was to receive a salary of £4,000 a year. An establishment of secretaries, engineers, clerks, sorters, and miners was conceived on an ample scale, and thousands of pounds' worth of machinery was despatched to the scene of operations.

The most ambitious method of work was immediately adopted. The people of the soil, who for generations had worked the mines, had come to recognise four methods of extraction: the method of pits sunk into the alluvium of the valleys; of open cutting in the hillsides, over which water was led; of workings in caves and fissures; of quarries by blasting in beds of calcspar, in the limestone of the valley. Of these methods, that of alluvial digging offered a small but certain reward. Nature had here already performed the first process of excavation, and in the bottom of the valley (once a lake) had put down a layer of ruby soil, washed from the sides of the encompassing hills. Here the hereditary diggers were mainly at work, and in the fat alluvium the stored rubies of centuries were waiting for the company to come and take them. But the company's head was just a little in the clouds, and it would have little to say to any but the most ambitious of the methods at its disposal. This was the method "of working in caves and fissures." From such caves the finest rubies ever found have been obtained, and visions of extraordinary wealth opened up to those who claimed that

the right course for the company to take was to drive its boring engines into the very bowels of the mountains, and wrest from there the perfect jewels in their keeping.

But it is one thing to know that there are rubies of great price stored in the interior of a mountain in



TRUCKS

front of you; it is quite another to find them. The company, in short, embarked on a policy of adventure. Its slender capital was poured out like water. Here and there a ruby of price was found; here and there a pocket of unfractured stones rewarded the arduous labour of those who drilled into the darkness

of the hills. And meanwhile anxious shareholders waited for a dividend that never came; an anxious Government, prone to the prompt collection of its dues, waited for its rent; and hope, delusive, receded farther and farther away as the company's capital approached extinction. The value of its shares dropped down, and soon touched the farcical limit of eighteen-pence. When it was all but too late the company turned to the obvious remedy: it recalled its enterprising battalions, and began washing for rubies in the soft soil of the valley. It soon became apparent that the prosperity of the company had now become a simple little matter of arithmetic. It was found that in every truck of earth sent up from the alluvial pits there was on an average a certain percentage of rubies. The company's object became to produce each truck at a cost less than the value of the rubies it contained, and to produce as many trucks as possible. The history of the company since then has been a history of devotion to this idea. The cost of production has been steadily reduced. Salaries now are but a lean shadow of their opulent past. The Government rent has been lowered to two hundred thousand rupees a year; its demand for arrears of rent has been withdrawn in the company's favour to the extent of many hundred thousand of rupees; and the substitution of electricity for steam, of water-power for fuel, the multiplication of diggers and machinery, have completed the turn in the direction of prosperity. It is admitted on all hands that the company has now entered on a period of quiet but steady prosperity;

and its shares that once went a-begging for eighteen-pence are now unpurchasable for a pound. Let us consider in more detail some of its methods of work.

The individual digger, who survives only under the paternal care of the State, takes out each year a licence from the company, for which he pays it a royalty of twenty rupees. Equipped with his licence he proceeds to dig a well in the manner already described, and the excavated mud, quickly washed, is his harvest. When the well begins to tumble in, or to get flooded with water, he quits it, and proceeds to dig another. The company excavates on a larger scale. It begins by taking a slice of several acres off the surface of the valley. It calls this "top-stripping," and the process means that it is taking off the layer of irrelevant matter that accumulated on the deposit of ruby alluvium after the lake finally dried up. This upper layer is valueless, and it is for the most part thrown aside, unexamined. The ruby-bearing soil, known as *byon*, is then attacked by an army of diggers. Day by day the pit grows wider and deeper; and, in its essence, all this is no more than if navvies were at work digging up earth for a railway embankment. There is nothing at the ruby mines more calculated to provoke astonishment in a spectator expecting advanced methods. For it is still all sheer, primitive human labour—the labour of the pick-axe, the crow-bar, and the spade; the kind of thing that flourished soon after the stone age went out.



DIGGERS

All day long, and far into the small hours of the dawn, the blue-coated diggers toil unceasingly. As the pit deepens, masses of white limestone, cleared of all surrounding earth, stand out like jagged islands. On the floor of the pit, rails are laid for the trucks which are to carry away the earth, and near the diggers these



THE OUTPUT OF THE WASHERS

rails ray out like fans from a turn-table. Thus each digger has a truck under his elbow. From the pit to the washing engines on the hill a brace of endless wires moves on pulleys. The trucks are hitched on to these, and move as the wires move. But at a little distance the wires are invisible, and then the trucks moving slowly in a perpetual double procession, as they

come and go, look a little mysterious. Each truck as it climbs the hill to the washing machine is seized upon and emptied into a trough, and as its contents are poured out, coolies in savage-looking rain-coats bear down on them with swift jets of water. Under this vigorous solvent, clay and gravel immediately part company; the clay to descend with the water into a pool, whence it is hoisted away to the river.

The gravel is now rapidly classified by means of a moving cylinder of graduated mesh. Through the mesh it falls into the hands of the sorters waiting below. But to lessen their labours, there is now in use an intermediate machine, the most interesting of those at work, and known as the pulsator. It offers a simple but interesting illustration of the application of fundamental laws of nature to human use. Of all the stones that enter the cylinder of mesh, the ruby is of the greatest specific gravity, and all light stones can be safely ignored. The pulsator separates the light stones from the heavy ones. It is an iron bucket, with a small aperture at the bottom, in which a piston moves up and down. Water pours into the bucket, and as the valve of the piston lifts, it rushes through this aperture, taking with it the heavier stones which by the constant churning of the piston and the sucking action of the water have gradually sunk to the bottom. The piston is hidden from sight in the mass of gravel, and its movement makes the gravel pulse as if it were alive The sucking of the water can be felt by placing one's



From a painting by J R Middleton

A BURMESE PONY.



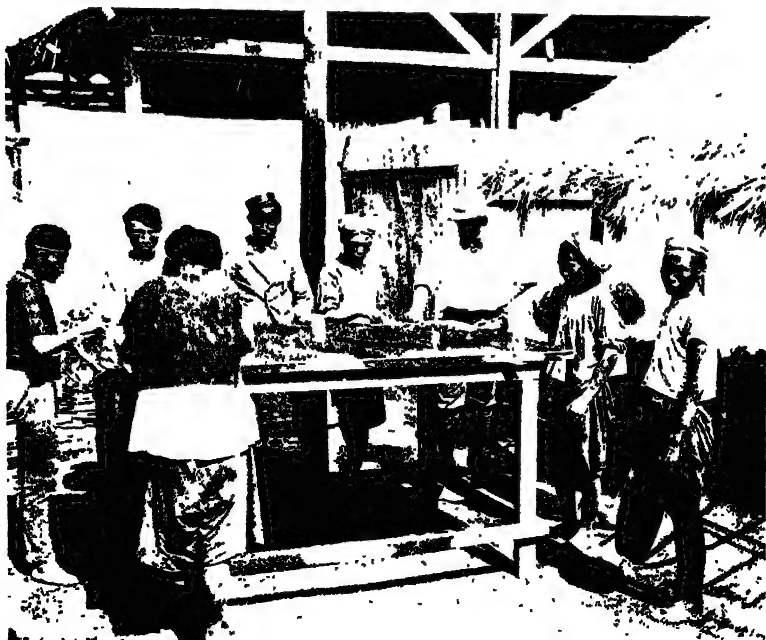
GENTLEMEN SORTERS

open hand on the surface: it is slowly but irresistibly drawn down; and here, buried in the midst of the warm gravel, one feels as if it lay upon the pulsing heart of the machine.

I have spoken of the swift jet of water which is flung on the contents of each truck as it reaches the mouth of the washing machine, and of its object—viz., the freeing of the gravel from all mud and clay. The process is really completed by a mechanical separator before the gravel enters the pulsator. The separator consists of three great revolving pans, which circle round iron combs let in like barbicans into their midst. Water pours in and the pans revolve from dawn till dark. At the

close of each day the gravel is drawn; but all day long the water that has poured through them has borne away the yellow clay, not unmixed with a small percentage of rubies. This clay is distributed outside the works, and as it heaps up it makes a cone like that of a mud volcano, furrowed and built up, and furrowed again, by the water hastening on its way.

The motive power is electricity, and its action is communicated in the ordinary way by means of innumerable wheels and endless leather bands. The whole purpose of the machinery, which has been adapted from that in use at the diamond mines at Kimberley, is first



UNDER SUPERVISION



THE SPOIL OF THE JUNGLE

to clear the gravel of clay, and then to classify it and make it ready for the finer work of the sorter. As the gravel pours out of the machines it is taken away in trays and flung in a heap upon a table. The sorter then, with a sweep of his arm, spreads out the dark



LEFT TO THEMSELVES

red mass in a thin layer. With his iron blade he separates this layer still further, and rapidly picks out the little pink stones, the palpable rubies, which lie gleaming in the mass. With another swift movement, he sends the surviving gravel flying into a truck by his side. When this is full it is taken away and its contents are subjected to a slower and more patient

scrutiny by native assistants. Many rubies are picked out by them; but there should be none in this second sorting of any size or value. There is yet a third stage. In the outer yard wait the *khanézimas*, women whose hereditary privilege it is to buy this refuse, and search it for what it may contain. No man is permitted to share in this perquisite of the women of Mogôk. It is here—where the gentlemen sorters sit, at the mouths of the grinding machines, swiftly reaping their precious harvests; and where their wild assistants pore over the refuse spread before them in the sun; and *khanézimas* in strange attire scratch like hens amidst the débris—that the human interest again becomes uppermost. Their place, at least, can never be taken by any machinery.

About sunset, and as the dark comes on, all the northern end of the valley, where the company is at work, breaks out in discs of light, and as one looks down into the mist-clad valley, lit with these electric fires, it presents a spectacle of unexpected beauty. All about the valley the great shadowy outlines of the mountains loom up against the sky; and in the deep pits under the flare of the lights, the miners dig, and the trucks creep along the double rails, till the stars pale again with the coming of the dawn.

In the clay of the valleys, buried side by side with the rubies, there are found curious relics of a distant past—the fish-hooks and net-weights of the lake dwellers, the axe-heads and weapons of primitive man. It is a strange contrast that is here presented, and



THE DIGGER'S HUT

one's thoughts reach out with sympathy across the wide gulf of time, to the dead men of whom these are the few surviving relics. They are beautifully made, these first instruments.

But the primitive life is not quite dead yet. On the mountains which overshadow the valley, lifting their great heads up amongst the stars, there are dark evergreen forests, perpetually wrapped in gloom. In these recesses herds of wild elephants still have room to wander, and in their shelter the tiger still stalks his easy prey; and herds of deer, breaking from the coverts of the hills, look down with startled wonder on the strange scene being enacted in the valley. In the silence of the dark nights, they have many strange and unknown onlookers, these miners digging for the little stones under the blue electric flame.

(v) THE GAMBLE OF LIFE

There are very fewe that are perfect in all pointes, specially being great, for they have always some faultes and spottes that are covered and hidden; but right perfect there are none or very few, and not many men have any great knowledge therein.—LINSCHOTEN.

In the lives of those who traffic in precious stones there are many vicissitudes, and stories are not lacking of great finds that are occasionally made. Even the *khanézimas*, who pick the rejected gravel of the company, are credited with substantial rewards. Only the other day a woman declared she had found a ruby of price in this refuse, and she made a great clamour of joy on finding it. But there were witnesses to prove

that the stone was found elsewhere by a man, who was not in possession of a licence, and so the matter had to be settled in a court of law; the company *versus* the owner of the stone. And not very long ago a Burman found a great ruby which was valued at £10,000. The company, at his request, sent it to England to be cut, and meanwhile lent him money on its security. But when it was cut, its value was found to have fallen to £2,000, and even for this price there is no one now who is willing to buy it. Its owner has become too poor to redeem it. It is not improbable that great stones have been found of which the world at large never hears, and may never hear; it is not impossible that once in the way the digger's pick unearths before his eyes a stone of price, and that he pockets it when no one is looking. The system of searching the miners is not very careful or very complete, and there are many loopholes of evasion. But it is not easy to discover a little stone in a great block of yellow clay, and it seems probable that in the main the company gets its due. Once in a while the rubies in the valley bottom are found in a cluster, all together, and this is at once the chance of the company and of the digger. For rubies found in this way are usually rubies of purity and size. Down in the valley, in one of the pits, there rise up a pair of great boulders near which a miner found a fortune. Every grain of earth has been cleared away from about these monoliths, in the search after the precious stone.

The natural vicissitudes of mining are increased in

the case of rubies by the difficulty of estimating the value of the uncut stone. A large ruby, of perfect colour and without flaw, is the most precious of all stones; and after it reaches a certain size, it is almost impossible to put any limit to its value. Such stones, it is needless to say, seldom disturb the spirit of the local miner, or the local dealer. But even in the case of smaller stones of fine colour, a just estimate of value can with difficulty be formed till they have passed through the ordeal of cutting. There is thus always a large margin for a gamble in the ruby trade.



THE DIGGER'S WIFE

And these natural vicissitudes are heightened by the character of the people. A Burman no sooner finds a stone of price than he embarks on a lavish expenditure. He must build a house, he must wear fine clothes, he must have a following of good fellows to share with him, while they enhance, his good fortune. But above all things he must accumulate merit, and lay up for himself great spiritual store to help him over his next incarnation. And to this end he must build a monastery, erect a pagoda, and bestow largesse upon the monks.

When the sources of his wealth run dry, he sheds these sudden glories one by one; all save the last, and that is an inalienable investment.

When I came up to the ruby mines, I met on the way, where Yé-wé village lies in a circle of the hills, a horseman on a quick-stepping little grey pony. For some time I had seen him making his way along the bridle path. He was the only other white man within the circuit of the wide horizon, so I waited to greet him. He proved to be an inspector of the ruby mines company, whose business it is to deal with illicit mining; and he told me as we rode forward many tales of the illicit miner. Under the arrangement that has been made with the company, it has the monopoly of the ruby tract. The interests of the people of the soil are, however, protected in this, that any man can dig for himself, so that he buys at a fixed price a permit from the company, which it cannot refuse to give him.

Persons found mining without a licence are liable to be imprisoned for six months; and if more diggers are found at work than the licence provides for, the extra men are fined. But to satisfy a magistrate and secure a conviction, it is necessary to seize the illicit miner in the act. And it is to the accomplishment of this feat that my companion's energies are perpetually directed. The illicit miner is like the jungle-fowl of these hills in his talent for effecting hairbreadth escapes. Thus, when all the inspector's plans have been laid and success seems assured, he and his minions rush the mine; an unexpected ditch or obstacle intervenes,

there is a second's pause; the surprised miner, leaving his tools, bounds out of his pit, and plunges into the jungle. A pick-axe and a spade are the only harvest. But occasionally he is caught, pick in hand, his heap of ruby earth beside him, surprise upon his upturned face; and thereafter six months' enforced leisure await



PALOUNG

him, in which to think of revenge. The spy—evil, if necessary, excrescence upon the society of honest men—is the pivot of the inspector's system; and the spy does not always get his information without betraying the confidence of a friend. When such confidences are lacking, he sets out for a likely country, and wanders about in the guise of a woodcutter, or innocent collector of herbs. Then one day he comes upon the miner,

and if he has the skill, escapes suspicion, and by lying in wait along the faint footpaths of the jungle, discovers the locality of the mine. After that it is hot-foot back to his master, and a swift return with success or not, as may be, in the sequel. The illicit miner has his own developed system of defence. He posts his sentries on some crag or vantage-ground, to give him warning of his antagonist's approach. And occasionally he buys up the spy who is sent to discover him. But your inspector, in spite of his occupation, is a very human fellow. Very glad to see you, very hospitable and friendly. This one lives at Kyatpyin in a little house by the highway, overgrown with wild roses, and happy with its little garden of English flowers, in which his children play.

(vi) FACETS

It takes time to enter fully into the beauty of Mogôk, of the great mountains, the mining town in the little valley, the grassy spaces, and the low swelling hills. There is nothing quite like them anywhere else in Burma. The climate, even in the middle of May, the culmination of the Burmese summer, is cool all day long, and of an evening one is tempted to stroll away over the hills, in the happy fashion of a better land; all is so green, the landscape so attractive, the blessed air so cool and fresh. About most of the bigger houses English flowers blossom; lilies and roses, the honey-suckle, the heart's-ease, and the daisy. And even the huts of the people are not without their flowers. Every



THE POLO-GROUND

day it rains a little, and the clouds gather in fantastic glory over the heads of the mountains, and make splendid cushions for the sun. When the hillsides are not green, they are a deep red, which glows in the evening sunshine, or purple when they are far away. The colouring is superb.

The town itself teems, as I have shown, with curious life, and a great many races congregate in this little valley, hidden amongst the hills. From the green recreation ground, soon to be mined by the company for rubies, there comes of an evening the thunder of the polo-players, and the changing fortunes of the game are followed with keen interest by a motley crowd pressing against the palings. In a little pavilion the European ladies of the settlement assemble. At the far end of the ground, *chinlone*, the graceful football of the Burman, is played simultaneously with cricket and polo. Down the white road beyond the farther palings, a Chinaman sprints on his bicycle, his pigtail flying in the wind ; while his wife, her small feet crushed into doll-like shoes, makes her way across the grass as if she walked on stilts. Even the polo-players are a strange medley of cavalry officers from India, of ruby-sorters and mining experts, the doctor, the magistrate, and the policeman, with a Sikh trooper thrown in to make a team. So it comes about that the young man sent from a London office to be a sorter of rubies ends by becoming an expert player at the most fashionable game in the world.

Beyond the polo-ground, its triple roof rising high

above the heads of the players, is the Panthay mosque. Texts from the Koran in sheets of Arabic letters are wrapped about its inner pillars, and from its tower the muezzin daily calls the faithful to prayer. Of the worshippers many are Chinamen of the obvious type; but there are some with the Muslim strain in them, the strain of the Arab and the Turk. One man, in a long white robe and red fez, might have come from toll-collecting at the Golden Horn; and another, in a blue *gelabieh*, would pass unnoticed in the bazaars of Cairo. But the most striking figure of all is that of the chief Mullah, a man of great height, with the beard of a prophet and the mien of a Hebrew patriarch. He came out with me into his garden of camellias, clothed in a great *caftan* of dark green taffeta, a tablet of gold embroidery like the Urim and Thummim of the high priest on his breast, a turban and a conical cap embroidered in dark and pale blue. He was accompanied by a nephew of Ibrahim, the last Sultan of Yunnan, and the Haji Nur-ud-Din (Ko-Shwe-Tin). They were well aware, through the medium of Chinese newspapers published at Hongkong, of the progress of events in the world, and took much interest in the Sultan of Turkey's mission to the Chinese Emperor on behalf of the Musulmans of China. The Sultan of Rúm, he called him, so pervading is the tradition of the everlasting city.

Ko-Shwe-Tin, otherwise the Haji Nur-ud-Din, is a ruby-merchant who has lived at Mogôk for twenty years. He is effusive in his loyalty to the British



THE CHIEF MULLAH, THE NEPHEW OF THE SULTAN, AND THE HAJI NUR-UD-DIN (KO-SHWE-TIN)

throne, and was, it appears, of some help to our columns when they first advanced to Mogôk after the fall of Mandalay. But he is now putting behind him the secular life; he is become a pillar of the Church; and having made the pilgrimage to Mecca, he is now resolved to devote the remainder of his life to pious works. He lives, in pursuance of this ideal, next to the mosque, and the best chamber of his house is set apart for the entertainment of the Patriarch, who has come on a visit to him from Talifu.



CHAPTER XLVIII

L'ENVOI

I LEFT this morning for Kyatpyin, by the bridle road that climbs over the hills behind the European settlement. It was a morning of great beauty, half-cloud, half-sunshine, and the noble form of the Chinthé-Taung overtopped everything with its splendour. I do not think that there is anywhere in the world a hill more beautiful than this. In the winter it wears a wonderful garb of ruddy pink and green, and at this season it is exquisitely coloured in hues of emerald and purple. And this comes of the long grass that covers all its shoulders, and of the deep woods that lie between, in the furrows and little valleys made by the rain. Moreover, it is seven thousand feet in height, and very noble in outline.

Soon after leaving Mogôk, my pony was picking his way along the cobbled lanes in the village of Yé-boo. It lies in the hollow of the little valley, and a willow-bordered stream runs by it. Its hedges are of pink roses, twined amongst *espaliers* of bamboo, and every lane is a double line of flowers, overlooked by silky peaches, and orange-groves, and ripening plums. Beyond it there is a great expanse



MUSULMANS OF YUNNAN

of mountain-side, diversified with yellow hamlets and dark monastery spires. Every moment, as the narrow bridle path ascends, the landscape widens, gaining in clarity and beauty, and with each step the little valley of Mogôk falls farther behind. All that is human of it grows less and less, shrinking away to its true proportions; and the discontent of one, the satiety of another, the little pride, and the little jealousies, and the little animosities, are withered in the splendour of the broadening world.

It is a very little valley, shut in by lofty mountains, and greatly cut off from the world; and those who go to live in it grow very tired of each other, very weary of looking at the blue-green hills, and the shadows of the restless clouds. They have an article of faith that the only fools in Mogôk are the Burmese, who, finding rubies, give them away again in pious works for the sake of a vague and far-away Nirvana; and down there in the midst of the turmoil of the trucks and engines, in the heart of the pits where the diggers toil, in the crowded market-place where the rubies gleam on brazen trays, in the maelstrom of the little mining town where thousands, from the untutored Meingtha digger to the cultivated English gentleman, labour, giving all their time and their zeal and great part of their lives to the digging, the buying, and the selling of the little red stones, it seems very foolish indeed to give them away again, to so shadowy an end as the accumulation of merit.

Yet here is the truth: that almost the only note

of the spiritual life, in the midst of this Babel of materialism, is struck by the Burman fool. One cannot resist this conviction here, on the mountain slopes, where the little villages slumber, and dark spires of monasteries climb toward the illuminate heavens.



WCOD-CARVING : THE RENUNCIATION OF BUDDHA

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